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*Winter • 1958-59*

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Send all change of address notices, undeliverable copies, subscription orders and other mail to *Editorial and Circulation Offices:* 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington 9, D. C.

Subscription Rates: $1.00 a copy, $4.00 one year, $7.00 two years, $9.00 three years, foreign and Canadian $.50 a year additional for postage.

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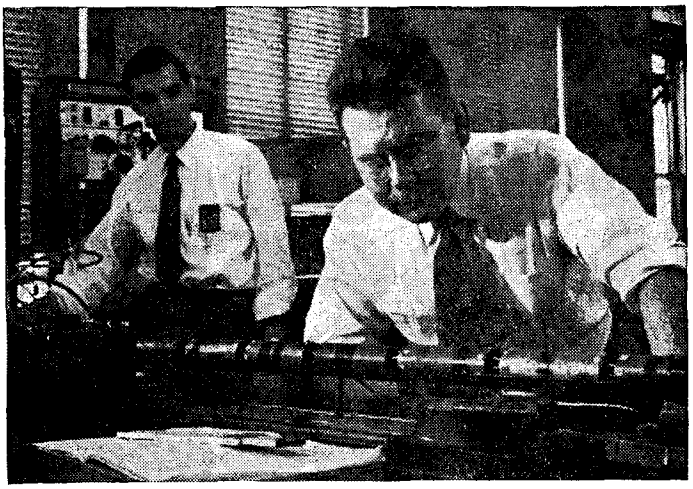

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Volume 28 *Winter, 1958-59* Number 1

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# THE INVASION OF PRIVACY (2)

## The Reshaping of Privacy

AUGUST HECKSCHER

THE DECLINE OF PRIVACY, one of the more depressing features of the time, takes many forms; some of them are more obvious than others. One hardly needs to emphasize the inquisitorial spirit that has characterized the past decade. A man's beliefs and convictions, even the degree of his enthusiam or doubt, have been matters for public inquiry. More than that, the opinions of his parents—or of his own distant and perhaps indiscreet youth—have seemed fit subjects for the authorities to investigate. The fact that these excesses have abated for the time being should not blind us to the serious incursions of which Congress and other public bodies have been guilty.

More subtle than these official acts, but no less hostile to the realm of privacy, has been a general disposition to emphasize the external and the superficial. The widely deplored trend to conformity, seen from this point of view, is the result of a common disregard for the secluded and inward qualities that at other times have been judged the heart of life. Conceivably, men and women could manage to go along in their behavior with the drift of things, keeping their thoughts and feelings to themselves. But this could only be true of a people for whom a rich inner life was habitual.

✪ AUGUST HECKSCHER was chief editorial writer of the New York *Herald Tribune* for four years and is now the director of the Twentieth Century Fund. His books include *These Are the Days, A Pattern of Politics, The Politics of Woodrow Wilson* and *Diversity of Worlds*, written with Raymond Aron.

This article is the second in an AMERICAN SCHOLAR series devoted to discussion of the invasion of privacy. The first article of the series, written by Richard H. Rovere, appeared in the Autumn issue.



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Americans, on the contrary, live in the open, and when they all say the same things, they are very likely to be thinking the same things, too. When they are behaving as one, they are likely to be feeling as one. And so the prevailing readiness to follow catchwords and fads, to blend as inconspicuously as possible with the group, can only be taken as proof that the domain of the private has been disconcertingly reduced.

A de-emphasis of privacy has affected in a very general way the conduct of our democracy. It is not only, as I have already suggested, that Congress deems itself privileged to pry into the lives of the people, but that the people feel entitled to pry into processes of government and into aspects of their elected officials that have traditionally been screened from immediate surveillance. Where no secrecy is permitted, diplomacy becomes virtually extinct. As for negotiations between states, they can scarcely be carried on when each move and countermove of the bargaining process forms the substance of headlines within the hour. In such circumstances things must be said upon each side to captivate the crowd. The result is a lowering of the whole level of discourse between public men. I am tempted to mention, besides, the frantic kind of curiosity that allows the public to suppose that it is entitled to know the innermost biological details concerning the health of its representatives. That it should feel a responsibility for judging the fitness of a President to carry on his tasks is one thing; that it should, beyond that, consider it its privilege to subject his most intimate bodily functions to direct scrutiny could only happen where the foundations of privacy have been eroded.

That privacy has been diminished in these and in many other ways may be taken as beyond much argument. Why this has come about is more disputable. Mr. Rovere, opening this series of discussions in this journal, has suggested that the complexity of a modern technological society inevitably subjects the citizens to a degree of surveillance that would not have been thought tolerable in earlier times. I would be more inclined to feel that a decay of the inner life precedes the invasion from the outside—as usually happens when the overthrow of states is involved. Moreover, the idea of "technological imperatives" does not seem convincing to me.



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The machine is used by man to further his own ends, and it can protect privacy (if that is what we desire) as well as circumscribe it. Yet the matter is not so one-sided as it is commonly made to appear; for if privacy has diminished, it has also, in many cases, been extended during epochs when the machine was exerting its sway. Meanwhile, the public sphere tends to shrink, and much that was formerly carried on in the broad daylight of competition, rivalry and discussion is done today mutedly, almost furtively.

The most obvious paradox in this regard is the growth of secrecy concomitant with the decline of privacy. It might have been assumed that a people which is inclined to make public professions of faith about almost everything, to perform in the broad light of day many actions that formerly were reserved for the sphere of intimacy, would have comparatively little fear of the dark. But the opposite is true. While men and women have been leaving less and less to be guessed at about themselves, they have been suspecting others of having the most sinister designs, conceived in a mysterious inner world. The habit of peering into everything has been accompanied by the conviction that secret plots are being successfully hatched. The two attitudes are related, of course: spying and conspiracy have often proved to be opposite sides of the same coin. Yet it might have been hoped that a people bred to the tradition of democracy could have matched its own openness of manner with a general faith in sunlight and fresh air.

The extension of privacy, or at any rate the diminution of the public sphere, can be observed in the newer tendencies of the educational world. Education in this country has had a tradition of being deeply public; it not only drew into its stream the widest possible representation of the citizenry, but its aim was to fit men for the broadest tasks. However much the development of the individual personality might be involved, the primary concern of education was the transmission of the culture of society as a whole. In the modern, coeducational college, however, the drift is toward communal values that minimize what is essentially public and play up the importance of the student's subjective and emotional problems. Where social life dominates intellectual life, the private affairs of men and women become inevitably more preoccupying than



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public learning. Extracurricular activities, instead of reflecting the political forum or the arena of combat, take their pattern from the suburban community. The curriculum becomes infected with strong doses of home economy or social hygiene, while the higher learning is threatened by specialization and the private jargons of increasingly narrow and isolated disciplines.

The city has always been a public place; the "man in the street" is a man alert to the conflicting current of opinions, aware of fads and fashions, although he is never wholly taken in by any of them. But in suburbia there are no streets; for that matter, there are no men, at least during the hours between eight and six. It is a place of women and of homes. The women never quite withdraw into these homes, and yet never entirely emerge from them. If it is argued that suburbia provides no privacy, it can be argued with equal justification that it provides no public arena—no square, no market place, no political responsibility. Here, to a disconcerting degree, men and women lead an existence without the disruption, the challenge and the risk of public duty. At the same time, they do not find any corresponding satisfaction in inner lives complexly woven and deeply lived.

In short, what is disturbing today is not merely the decline of privacy; it is equally the decline of a public sphere. We are so used, indeed, to praising the privacy we seem in danger of losing that we have almost forgotten what virtue there can be in its opposite. It has not always been so. For the Athenians of the classic age, private life was always conceived as something unworthy of man at his best. It was in the public realm that he found the means to excellence and virtue; here, and here alone, he could perform the deeds that made his fame live and achieve results more durable than his own brief existence. The slave was not permitted to enter this realm; the barbarian never had the wit to organize and establish it. Both were something less than men. In comparison to the rivalry and excitement of the forum, the household was for the Greeks only a place where the necessities of life were fulfilled. Its darkness originated in the secrecy, and even the degradation, surrounding the rites of birth and death. The Greeks had never heard of such a word as "publicity," with its suggestion that something essentially private has been trumpeted forth. They never had to worry about



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"public relations," which is too often a way of debasing essentially intimate qualities, such as kindness and friendship, by misapplying them in the context of the group.

The derangement of the private and the public spheres in American life is nowhere so vividly or so sadly illustrated as by the teen-ager. A denial of responsibility marks a retreat into a special teen-age world, the substance of which is all mist and fog. The citizen of this world has no public role; rather he defiantly displays many types of conduct that might more decently have remained hidden. The public sphere is the home of speech and action; it is here that a man can hope to be "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words." Yet speech and action are, in this sense, denied the teen-ager. Living in a private world, he communicates in what is very largely a private tongue, with the English language either blurred or else deliberately (and often amusingly) transformed by slang. More often he cannot communicate at all, being unable to give objectivity to his feelings or to materialize his intent. As for action, the teen-ager can, of course, make movements and even on occasion appear quite agitated. But what he does has not the individuality, the clearness of outline, the definite beginning and end that distinguish the performance of deeds from animal behavior or instinctive conduct.

Doubtless, teen-agers have always been much as they are now; what is striking is the degree to which they are catered to in the United States and accepted as representative. In their elevation to something close to a model in our civilization, we see writ large certain tendencies that are apparent at all levels. Almost everywhere, as with the teen-agers, we find behavior taking the place of action, private jargons taking the place of public speech, and a retreat from the forum into the clique. The picture window, serving in the typical housing development more as a means for having others look in than for letting the owner look out, stands as a perfect symbol of the confusion of realms, a confusion that spreads from the teen-ager to society as a whole. Vacancy or conformity at the core, combined with the display before others of what should be an inner privacy, is a situation more menacing, and certainly more difficult to cure, than a deliberate attack upon one's personal citadel.



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The idea that the private and public realms are coexistent, and that the real problem is a right relationship between them rather than the disproportionate elevation of one or the other, we owe to a remarkable study that has been published within the year. *The Human Condition,* by Hannah Arendt, is one of those rare books that can be read many times, from many points of view, always revealing some new facet, some unexpected richness of perspective or understanding. I should like to draw on it here for the illumination it casts upon our concern with privacy. There are two levels of existence, Miss Arendt maintains: that of necessity and that of freedom; that of mere survival and that of adventure, choice, courage, fame. In the classic age the former was kept from view. The slaves and the women had no share in the citizenship of the time; but to free men there always was open the chance of rising to a kind of second life, a leap into freedom and full manhood. Similarly, the Middle Ages gave through the church the possibility of crossing over every day from the mundane and secular into the glory of the sacred. In each case, a form of immortality was the reward. The danger of both approaches was that portions of life were robbed of the vitality and meaning that might have been achieved. The Greeks robbed the private sphere; the Middle Ages, the secular. However, each gave to a man's existence the clearness that comes from understanding one thing supremely well, and neither invited the soul to wander amid the murk—between public and private, between heaven and earth. Men at their best were human beings; they were even divine beings. They were never a statistic or a uniformity, moving listlessly amid the unindividualized mass.

The trouble with men who live their lives in public is that they tend, when they are in private, not to be very interesting. Socrates with his eternal questions may well have seemed rather a bore to his family. Of Gladstone there is the well-known complaint that he treated a personal encounter as if it were a mass meeting. In the ideal society the vitality of the private sphere counterbalances that of the public sphere, and enrichment and deepening of individuality accompany the doing of great deeds and the speaking of great words. Christianity played a major role in bringing about this enhancement of personality. Much later, as Miss Arendt points out,



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Rousseau gave a whole new dimension to the realm of intimacy. It might seem a paradox—although I hope that by now it will not seem so—that one man should have both deepened the content of privacy and, in his political philosophy, vastly extended the involvement of the citizen in the public sphere.

Miss Arendt's theme is that the activities of life fall properly into either the public or the private realm, and that a society is disordered when there is confusion between them. The transplanting of an action not only distorts it; its very nature may be altered in the process. Take something as simple as gossip, for example. Inherently private, gossip can perform a highly useful function, as anyone who has lived in a smaller community will testify. It ventilates the closed circles of existence and provides a channel for the kind of human discourse without which a society remains unwarmed and impersonal. When it is not deliberately malicious, it permits the standards of the community to evolve and make themselves felt without undue harshness for any individual. But gossip corrupted by publicity, deprived of the free, amorphous quality of talk, and congealed in print, loses its humanity; it becomes essentially political, but without the broader issues and the tests of responsibility that are appropriate to the political sphere.

A more dramatic and basic example of the transformation of an act through its transposition from one realm to another is provided by Miss Arendt in a penetrating discussion of the ethic of goodness. The essence of virtue, she says, is that it be personal, hidden from the world—indeed, hidden almost from the well-doer himself, so that his right hand knows not what the left hand has accomplished. Goodness must be of the spirit, fleeting, serving no end but its own, leaving behind (at least in the good man) no visible trace. As soon as this quality is made public, subject to organization and accountability, it ceases to be goodness. Righteousness passes over into self-righteousness and the sin of pride is born. Public charity can of course accomplish many admirable results in the world; but the point is precisely that these results *are* in the world. They are no longer of the spirit; and however socially useful they may be, they do not meet the radical test of Christian virtue.

Consumption, like all the essential tasks of the household, has



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traditionally been part of the private realm; it has been one with that side of a man's life in which his elementary physical and biological needs are satisfied. Miss Arendt argues convincingly that one of the most significant sources of the contemporary world's confusion of values lies in the transfer of consumption from a private to a public function. Consider man in a simpler state: he is compelled by his condition to labor for the sustenance of daily life; he makes and consumes what is required by nature, with nothing left over to provide the occasion for freedom or for choice. Because of its origins in necessity, labor has in the past been essentially private, undertaken within the household and performed by men lacking the essential rights of citizenship. It is only in the modern world that we have seen it brought forth and made a dominant factor of the public scene. The result, as Miss Arendt points out, has been to improve vastly the conditions of labor; but it has also been to blur the difference between labor and the higher forms of work and action that are essentially of the public sphere.

Just as labor has been brought out from its former seclusion in this way, so has consumption, until in the Western countries today the phrase used to describe the basic conditions under which we live is "a consumer society." That has long seemed to me a curious, disturbing phrase, yet not until I read Miss Arendt's book did I perceive its full import. What we are doing by its use is to belittle the status of free individuals, putting the purchaser of an automobile or television set in the position of one who actually annihilates and digests these things—as a savage, who was incapable of understanding their purpose, might do. At the same time, we are belittling the goods themselves—often wonders of technological precision—by implying that they are not durable but are absorbed as soon as they are produced. (We go further, of course, and by deliberate obsolescence insure that the semipermanent shall be made scarcely more lasting than a thing of paper.) By talking of "consumers" and "consumer goods" we describe our society in terms that emphasize what is most circumscribed and is least touched by a public spirit.

In every great society the decisive element has been very different from the rather pitiful individuals who produced and con-



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sumed the necessities of life. What has been decisive has been the men who lived by action: the users, the possessors, those who have availed themselves of what is at hand, creating out of durable things new combinations and possibilities of the spirit. Even today we find here and there a few individuals who in their attitude toward physical things endeavor deliberately to set themselves above the role of mere consumers. These are the people who pride themselves on a car that is old enough to be a real possession or wear a tweed jacket frazzled at the elbow. Such people may not necessarily rise to the test of great words and great deeds, but they do try to affirm, sometimes a little quaintly or ostentatiously, that they are something more than drones condemned to spend their lives in a dreary round of consumption.

It is in the home that the plethora of today's goods is consumed; and the cult of the home, as a result, has developed in alarming proportions. The authors of utopias have usually been careful to insist that the home shall be comfortable, and yet never so preoccupying as to draw men and women completely away from the public sphere in which their characters as citizens are developed. Anyone judging the present-day American scene must be struck by the disproportion between the lavishness of the country's interior gadgetry and the impoverishment of so many of its public facilities. The kitchen seems to take a higher rank than the school; the car than the highway upon which its usefulness depends. While this withdrawal has been taking place, while an orgy of consumption has been going on within, the home has lost many of the higher functions formerly associated with it. It has ceased to be a center of education and discipline; it has lost its character as a focus of authority. Recreation has become largely a matter of the household, with the withering of ceremonial and festive aspects of great popular gatherings; but this has happened at a time when the entertainment that does go on within the home has been largely reduced to watching television.

Our concern is with the restoration of privacy, free from invasions by the public. Yet we have seen how differently the problem can present itself. Actually there seems today to be a retreat into privacy, and at the same time a disposition to flaunt areas of



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life hitherto hidden in the public light. The privacy lacks substance and depth, while the publicly performed portions of our life lack the edge of excellence, risk and high responsibility. What seems actually to have happened is that we move largely in a sphere that is neither that of personality nor of politics, but one that must be called the social sphere. Here the emphasis is on behavior rather than action. Individuality gives way to the uniformity that can be measured and controlled, leaving room neither for great actions on the one hand, nor for inwardness and conscience on the other. The social sphere is, needless to say, important. Its rules of conduct, its overt and superficial conformities, keep men from hopeless divisions. Through it are provided the audience and the stage for political action; through it, also, the individual is kept from too complete a submersion in self. The social is the sphere of necessary unity and practical compromise; but when it becomes dominant, devouring the realms of the private and the public alike, life lacks both inward depth and external adventure.

What has happened to privacy, therefore, may be said to be less an invasion than a corruption. Its meaning can be restored only when we see it once more in relation to a clearly conceived and vital public realm. The home can generate emotionally enriching experiences when it is part of a community more maturely developed than contemporary suburbia. The student can move with a sense of inner rewards when the modern university in its social organization takes on again something of the atmosphere of a free city. Life in general can be rewarding to the individual in proportion as there is a chance for lucid communication and meaningful action on a broad stage. In the inherited tradition we have had the themes of personal intimacy and of public responsibility both amply developed; if we seem to have fulfilled neither, but to have fallen into a misty mid-region of social conformity, it may not be because of pestiferous officials or because of the dictates of the machine. It may be because, lacking clarity of concepts and rigor of philosophical views, we have failed to distinguish between the things that belong to ourselves and those that belong to the polis.



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# *Recollections of Gulliver:*

## *The Inquiring Reporter In Lilliput*

JOHN ATHERTON

### I

Yes, that's true, he slipped away
In the middle of the night. We
Had just begun a routine security check.
What did we know of his background?
Who were his parents? The best maxim,
I've found in this business, is to mistrust
Your professional humanitarian.
He should have sunk their whole fleet—
Instead he simply towed away the ships.
This is off the record, mind you,
But I was the one who suggested to the king
That the monster's eyes be blinded
While he slept, and then that he be put
At some useful public work.
A great gray granite pyramid
For this administration, or even
A new building for the Ministry
Of Police. That's right, a brute
Mind is only kept in check with fear.
No, of course he had no passport—
He just slipped away.

### II

He's gone. My boy cried when he heard.
We used to go to watch him being fed.



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He ate just like you and me, only more.
Then he'd pretend to be still hungry
And pick somebody from the crowd
Just to throw a scare in him. Once
He snatched up my Jim between his finger
And his thumb—his mother almost fainted—
And pretended he was going to eat him.
Didn't hurt him a bit. Sure he was scared—
Scared and proud, too, because Gulliver
Had picked him out. He made a report
In school, how the giant opened his mouth
And rolled his big red tongue around,
Looked fierce, and then laughed so loud
It blew Jim's cap right off his head.
Then he asked his name, and where
He lived, and told him always to be a good boy
And mind his parents. Oh, he was a good man,
Just like you and me, only bigger.
He liked to sit outside his house at night,
In his shirtsleeves, while they shouted the news in his ear.
Yes, that's what I think,
They forced him out, if the truth
Were ever really told.

## III

I'll bet you've never had the whole story.
There was a lot more to that nasty business
Than met the eye. Did you ever see him?
Absolutely disgusting. There were several
Women in that circle around the prince who—
Yes, I've had it on good authority.
Our Lilliputian race is pure,
But he'd mongrelize us into giants,
Massive brutal men who'd ravish



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Our daughters, defile our beds
Until the gross foaming tide
Of bigness swamped us all.
Oh, this is no dream, friend,
This is all foretold in the prophecy of Lignap.
Here, it's all right here, printed in
The *Lilliputian Sentinel*: have a copy.

## IV

I'll state the facts simply.
Yes, of course there were rumors,
But we can discount those.
I pointed it out to the king
In the last session on the budget.
Our economy can't stand it, that's all
I said, but I had charts and graphs
And figures to back me up.
Let's forget the sentiment;
Let's forget all that bosh
About morality; let's just take
The record. Here we are,
Schedule A. Daily, this is,
Six beeves, forty sheep, six
Barrels of wine (that's at one meal,
So multiply by three, gives
Eighteen barrels of dry sherry),
Other items, bread, et cetera,
In like proportion (my God
That man could eat, his teeth
Like millstones), all this now
Times three hundred and sixty-five,
And then converted into pounds,
Shillings and pence, gives us
An annual expenditure of over



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Four hundred thousand pounds
(I have the exact figure here)
*Per annum*, just for food and drink.
Why, that's bigger than our
Military budget; it's a quarter
Of the national income; it's
National bankruptcy. He had to go—
He wasn't economically feasible.
Yes, prospects for the next few months
Are moderately good. Perhaps
Some readjustment in the building
Trades; car-loadings were up
In April; dry goods still upset
From dumping all Gulliver's clothes
On a glutted market. Some unemployment
In the tailoring and victualing trades,
But that will soon be absorbed in
Catapults and ship-building.
You're welcome. I'm always glad
To talk to you gentlemen of the press.

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# The Dangers of Nonconformism

MORRIS FREEDMAN

NOT LONG AGO I HEARD one of this country's professional intellectuals—a former university president, a present foundation president—address a university gathering of several hundred persons. The gentleman attacked the blight of conformism in the United States; he deplored the fact that men in gray flannel suits had become "interchangeable"; he lamented the loss of true individualism. I do not mention his name, for I agreed with much of what he said, and what I did not agree with is not quite my point at present. What struck me while listening to his urbane talk was his own "interchangeable" appearance: neat, three-button blue suit, plain tie, precisely coiffured graying hair, erect carriage: the very model of a model executive, not only interchangeable with dozens of men in similar positions and in "gentlemen of distinction" ads, but ready to be played in the movies by a dozen or so actors—Walter Pidgeon, Cary Grant, Gregory Peck, Ray Milland. It struck me as somewhat odd, too, that several hundred persons should applaud in unison a speech urging nonconformity, and that during the question period one of the questions that did not "conform" with the speaker's views should be greeted with derision.

Of course one man's conformism may be another man's heresy. But what seems to have taken place in American intellectual life in recent years is the rising of just about any nonconformity to the status of respectable orthodoxy. It is even more strange that it has become as risky to attack these nonconformist orthodoxies as it ever was to attack a conformist one. These days the best protection is to become a nonconformist. In Mary McCarthy's novel about aca-

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demic life, *The Groves of Academe*, the central character withstands an attempt by the liberal college administration to fire him for incompetence by falsely claiming to be a Communist. The nonconformist orthodoxy in that environment clearly required being more than fair with Communists, and the professor changed color accordingly. Indeed, it is probably more comfortable today on many campuses to be politically radical than politically conservative. One sure way of getting a job in an advertising agency, I have been told, is to insist that you are an angry young rebel.

The question of conformity, of course, exercises only those certain portions of the American population that loosely may be called the "intellectual" circles. College communities undoubtedly form the largest of these, although the publishing, advertising and entertainment circles are not insubstantial. The issue of conformity scarcely exists for others, the majority, who conform automatically and happily, without giving the question a second thought. Nonconformists have this majority in mind when they attack conformity. They condemn this majority for deriding individual differences, for responding in herd-fashion to the blandishments of advertising and public relations experts, for being responsible for mass taste and mass opinion. No doubt the nonconformists are right in all of these charges. Yet it may easily be shown that the self-elected nonconformists are culpable on every count on which they attack conformists.

It has been well established that nonconformists, instead of responding to the values of tabloid newspaper, subway car or television advertisements, respond to a no less specific and no less rigid set, particularly those in the advertisements of the New York *Times*, the *New Yorker*, the *Saturday Review* and the like, or of the commercials of FM stations that broadcast classical music all day. Although the nonconformist may refuse, with a shudder, to engage in the barbaric practice of drinking instant coffee, he will no less eagerly sip *espresso*. If you can construct a stereotype of the man in the street, you can build an equally plausible one of the man out of the street. Of course, as I say, this proposition is not new, as was definitively demonstrated by Russell Lynes's wickedly clever classifications some while ago in *Life* of the habits of low-



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brow, middle-brow and high-brow (classifications which themselves no doubt helped establish new laws of how not to conform).

Were all this merely a matter of an amusing sociological pastime —observing and arranging the eating, drinking, dressing, entertainment, furniture buying, political and general ideological habits of low-, middle- and high-brows, or of conformists and nonconformists—there would not be much point in bringing up the matter again after Lynes, Riesman and others have settled it so exhaustively. Actually, however, much more is involved. It seems to me that the orthodoxy of the nonconformists is especially dangerous since it claims to be the result of free investigation and free thought, the product of the uncontrolled, individual mind. Orthodoxy clearly related to some conformist dogma we can so much more easily accept or reject on its own basis.

Let me cite the subject of education from among a number I might have chosen. The country is engaged in a major debate on the problem: the debate is quite limited, on one side, to the professional educators, referred to as "educationists" by the opposition; and, on the other, to what might be called the humanists, many of whom would also proudly claim the title of nonconformists (for they refuse to accept the majority attitude toward education). Now I like to think of myself as among the humanists; and I am certainly appalled by the more extreme notions of educators who believe in teaching the "whole child" (presumably to the suppression of any talented part of him), who believe in teaching "life adjustment" rather than subject matter, who believe in "social promotion," et cetera, et cetera, ad nauseam. I hold that persons who believe such things without qualification should be opposed vigorously; I believe that they should not have final or exclusive say about the schooling of American children, as they now do in many places. But having said this, I must also say that I do not think that the professional educators are to a man villains or idiots—as many critics of them do say or come close to saying.

I probably would not have come to this last conclusion, mild as it may seem, except for the excess and inconsistency of the professional nonconformists on the subject of education. Like nonconformists elsewhere, the nonconformist here prefers to deal with



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abstractions rather than with reality. One of the many realities of the problem of American education is surely the immense compulsion for universal schooling. Most states have some kind of law compelling attendance in school of every young person up to a certain age regardless of his willingness to learn. I do not say that such laws offer a blanket excuse to educators for their positions, but these laws, the result of great community pressures in the past, are almost always neglected by extremist critics of the schools who insist on an across-the-board raising of standards. Nor have I seen critics of the schools consider the broader pressures in American life that tend to make American education the very special thing that it is.

Consider *Life* magazine's much-publicized first issue in a series on the "Crisis in Education." It blasts the casual diffuseness of American schools by contrast with the concentrated seriousness of Russian ones. The day of a Russian boy and the day of an American boy of the same age are compared, both in school and after. As one might expect, the American boy is inept at mathematics, which he takes as a joke; he tosses off his homework; he is adept only at rock-and-roll and swimming. In short, the American boy is typical of many American young people, who, among other things, are interested in finding out about the making of a movie, or looking at scantily dressed young actresses changing costumes, or reading about horse racing and the latest trend in cars, or going to church to see their minister perform tricks of magic, or looking at the new fashions in clothes and carpets—or reading the latest *Life*, which, in addition to criticizing American education, devoted that same issue to covering all of these edifying and instructive aspects of the broad American scene for its readers. *Life* magazine itself is certainly one of the main forces in making American life what it is; yet the editors, I am sure, would never think of blaming themselves for emphasizing values possibly inimical to seriousness in education. (Perhaps I ought to mention that I do not belong to the nonconformist faction which criticizes *Life*; all in all, if anyone cares, I think the magazine is all right.)

It was not so long ago that a position taken by a Luce publication would have been instinctively opposed by large numbers of nonconformists; but *Life* in recent years has so well caught the



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importance of being fashionably nonconformist that it is now a leader in establishing accepted nonconformist thought, which, of course, some while ago spilled over from the high-brow crest onto the extensive middle-brow plateaus. On the matter of education, *Life* and other media shaping mass nonconformist ideology have now laid down the party line, making it intellectually suicidal to suggest that possibly the educators have their own peculiar problems to solve before they can reshape their curricula to respond to the present pressures. On most campuses, I venture, a professor in liberal arts would be read out of the ranks if he said a good word about colleges of education, let alone about educational television, which combines two bogeys. The pressure of nonconformists to force an unmodulated conformity to their present position on education makes it extremely difficult for humanists of good will to conduct that "dialogue" with the educators which the foundation president I spoke of earlier insisted is necessary for understanding and progress. Perhaps it is an exaggeration, even a distortion, to say that nonconformists, like Communists of old, insist on free speech for themselves but not for their opponents; certainly one is tempted to think this when a woman in the audience I mentioned made a remark favorable to the schools and was answered with a quip from the speaker and jeers from the audience.

I have spent this much time on education because the danger of intransigent nonconformism seems to me greatest at this moment in that area; nonconformist opposition may yet do as much damage to American education as the educators themselves have done—although I concede it would probably take nonconformism a long time to establish a record of equal harm. The dangers of nonconformism are to be found wherever opinions, tastes, standards, judgments and beliefs are operative. Let me catalogue from my own recent experience a number of positions, attitudes and habits of behavior and thought no nonconformist in good standing can hold these days. These are, of course, subject to rapid change, like fashions in ladies' dress. Also, I should say, it is not essential to reject *all* to remain a respectable nonconformist—only most of them.

It is impossible, then, for the nonconformist to say a good word



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about Dulles, Nixon, Lyndon Johnson or (since Dwight MacDonald's critique in *Commentary*) James Gould Cozzens, or a bad one about Henry James, Adlai Stevenson, Lionel Trilling or Freud; to express approval of any television show (except *Omnibus*, Ed Murrow or Sid Caesar) or of any American movie (except the inexpensive and badly lighted ones, or the solemn westerns, like *High Noon*); to dislike any foreign films (except those imitating American ones); to believe that you can buy ready-made a good hi-fi set; to wear a non-Ivy-league suit or long hair if a man, or to wear or not wear a sack dress if a woman (I am not sure what feminine nonconformism calls for at the moment); to prefer American cars, for any reason, to European; to believe that there may be any justice in the official position on Oppenheimer; to defend Western diplomacy on any basis; to invite company to dinner without candles on the table and without chamber music in the background; to criticize Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams as playwrights or otherwise (of course, the shifting popularity of each is constantly causing nonconformist adjustments); to like Tschaikovsky or Irving Berlin, or to dislike Leonard Bernstein or Mozart; to express admiration for Marilyn Monroe or any other American movie star; to disparage Alec Guiness; and so on and on. Since some of the items I list are clearly considered heinous heresies in some quarters and likely to cost individuals professing them their jobs or at least their reputations, I hasten to add that I know no one guilty of more than one of them; as for myself, I plead the fifth. Nor is this altogether frivolous, for I do know of one college teacher who did not have his contract renewed at least in part for his persistent advocacy of the conformist Southern position on segregation; and I know of one junior executive in advertising who will always remain junior because he occasionally wears a double-breasted, navy-blue Cheviot suit with brown shoes—"like a subway rider reading the *Daily News*," he was described to me by a disapproving colleague.

There is no more self-righteously, high-mindedly closed a mind than that of a nonconformist. It is likely that he will begin every conversation with some such gambit as "I know this isn't a popular position, but. . . ." He will insist that no one since Galileo or Joan



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of Arc has had as much courage as he. Challenge him, and he will dismiss you as a peasant not worth his attention. "If you don't know what's wrong with American culture," I heard one champion nonconformist say down his nose to someone who mildly demurred on the subject, "then there's no point even talking with you." You can never ask about the emperor's clothes lest you prove at once in the nonconformist's eyes to be a monumental repository of naïveté.

Obviously, neither conformity nor nonconformity is to be accepted or rejected per se. What is to be rejected is the nonconformity that is so sure it is right that it is going to cram itself down your throat. No doubt the heresy of today may well become the orthodoxy of tomorrow, but we should not hurry the process any more than we have to; heresies of worth are quite capable of making their own way. If we have anything to fear from the conformists who wish to change the world in accordance with their ideologies, as we no doubt do, then we have equally much to fear from the phalanxes of the nonconformists—and perhaps more, for I sense an aggressive belligerence among nonconformist sects that seems as zealous as olden W.C.T.U. fanaticism. I am thinking, for example, of the San Francisco howlers for whom anything conventional is to be denigrated for the reason of conventionality alone. There are also those chronic nonconformists who do not have even a principle to guide them; they rebel in every direction at once for the sheer sake of perverseness. College campuses have become populated lately with bearded, anarchic mediocrities who blackmail their fellows and their professors into accepting them for more than their worth by trading on the current high value of nonconformity.

Nonconformism today, whatever particular form it takes, appears to be a legitimate enough descendant of the soft liberalism of the thirties. Like the Stalinist creed with which it was often allied, this liberalism saw the world through glasses that never quite focused on things in themselves. It saw things only as fuzzy abstractions that fitted a variety of inflexible needs of the mind. I recall the argument, for instance, that "decent" people were simply not aware of ethnic differences. An ingredient, too, of this soft liberalism was that puritanism which has always been a part of American intellectual life. It is inclined, a priori, to deny any pleasures or



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successes in popular culture and to look for its satisfactions in more rarified atmospheres. (American movies are only a recent subject for serious nonconformist discussion.) I suppose, too, that mass production, which was invading every aspect of American life in the twenties and the thirties, had to be resisted by a determined seeking out and idealizing of the unique, the handmade product or thought.

One would have expected, however, or at least hoped, that the impulses that turned "thinking" persons away from the passive acceptance of mass-produced things and ideas would have also brought them to the enlightenment of approaching any thing or idea on its own merits rather than through a conditioned reflex. Certainly something like the Museum of Modern Art's tireless, wholesome independence in considering machine-produced objects as worthy of aesthetic attention should have helped nonconformism to develop more broadly, for the Museum is one of the worshiping places of New York nonconformists (although one should never underestimate the power of a nonconformist to compartmentalize). Certainly, too, one would have liked to think that nonconformism, once it cast off the shackles of Communist dogma, would not harden into similarly thoughtless patterns of response to fixed stimuli.

If nonconformity is to have its rightful say in American life, as it did with Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Veblen, it must stop making a fetish of itself. Conformity with its range of established, nonevangelical possibilities may, in the end, prove to have the greater attraction for those genuinely seeking a free and full life. After all, unrestricted amateur nonconformism is one of the honorable paths in American history. In the meanwhile, we must oppose all efforts of the dedicated nonconformists to make us not conform according to their rules.



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# From the Journal of Ruth Benedict

*The letters and journals and a selection of published and unpublished papers of Ruth Benedict have recently been edited by Margaret Mead for a book to be published in February, 1959, by Houghton Mifflin Company under the title* An Anthropologist at Work: Writings of Ruth Benedict. *The following fragments from the journal that she kept intermittently from 1912 until the 1930's were found only after the book had gone to press.*

*Ruth Benedict was on the Editorial Board of* The American Scholar *from 1941 to 1944. Her three books are* Patterns of Culture*;* Race: Science and Politics *(which has been out of print but is being reissued as an Anchor Book by Doubleday); and* The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.

*Dr. Benedict wrote much of her journal on loose slips of paper. This first fragment was written in pencil on sheets of rough paper. The date was added in ink, and "religion" was written in the margin. The capitalization and punctuation are her own.*

July 12, 1930

"God" is the name we give to ideal interests, to the whole as against the partial, to the abiding as over against the transitory. It is the traditional way of conceiving the only thinkable existence. We do not credit the existence of our own good impulses till we have called them angels, and we do not believe there is any staying-power in the universe till we have called it god. Some more sophisticated people too are genuinely helped by mythology; they feel temperamentally a great abyss between using the mythology and not using it—they call it the distinction between God's having subjective and objective reality. (See Pratt, "Religious Consciousness"; and Leuba *re* personal God.) But by some fluke, I never did get tied up with a mythology; all traditional images for "God" are vivid and valid in some respect; why should one change them? but,



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equally, why should [one] cling to one and deny another. My "religious" life was from childhood a picture of retiring into a room where no one ever comes but myself—I never brought there anything from this world, not even God. Or it was a hillside where beautiful beings moved (as I saw afterwards in some of Blake's drawings: without need of stepping) and where all life could be full of recollection and of dignity. They were always completely religious experiences, I think—they had emotion, no end, and they were always my version of life under the aspect of eternity. And what else is God? To me certainly nothing more. So many say that emotion is impossible except as one objectifies and personifies a god the father or god the lover. But my emotion is roused rather by the dream of human life being lived in some thinkable fashion—not cut always at its roots and thrown back miserably to wither until it's able finally to strike another poor shoot and go through the cycle again. In my "room," on my "hillside" the deepest emotions of discovery, of recognition, of beauty are possibilities—the objective reality of "god" certainly wouldn't help. Religion for me is the better for not being cumbered with fantastic symbols which have passed into *beliefs* and must be incongruously scrutinized as to whether they're true or not. What have they to do with this passionately felt prayer, somehow, somewhere to have lived as one might dream of all beautiful people living. What have they to do with the life of the spirit?

* * * * *

*Ruth Benedict always made extensive corrections in her writing. In this second fragment the excised words and phrases have been retained and marked through, just as they were found in her handwriting in an old examination "blue book."*

West Alton, weekend
July 26, 1930

There's no use trying to read off ethical ends from the human constitution. Every aim the spirit ~~of man~~ sets before itself is subversive of human make-up. That make-up is, at its best, the endow-



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ment of a healthy animal, and, heaven knows, if you've watched a pair of nesting bobolinks you don't doubt that's enough of an endowment. But that's the rub: in so far as we set up what we're pleased to call specifically human ends that endowment is useless —worse than useless, it's a liability. Does that seem too strong a statement? ~~And look at the people who leave~~. Well then, where are the good healthily ~~endowed~~ functioning humans who have made momentous contributions to the spiritual treasury? ~~The~~ Instead ~~they're~~ our giants are the Beethovens, the Dostoievskys, the St. Thomases, the St. Francises. Christ, so far as we can guess, was blessed from the start in lacking the fundamental drive of the healthy animal, and Buddha succeeded in ridding himself of it—like all the rest of the mystics. The artists seem more often to have been forced by circumstances into impotence—sometimes their malfunctioning takes other directions. But the point is its malfunctioning and of course their music, their poetry, their theology —whatever they deal in—is a compensation, a rationalization, of their own self-decapitation.

At least that's as far as the life of the spirit has got yet. Perhaps Greece was on a different track; we've been told so. And her healthy insistence on the mean and her spiritual obtuseness to human inequality and the fact that her great names are Aristotle and Phidias and Pericles, for instance, and that her sculpture is dreamless beyond belief, all these things go to bear out the theory. ~~But~~ If it's so, it goes far to prove how little ~~way~~ distance the cultivation of the healthy endowments gets us in the way of art. Most people wouldn't agree, of course, but for me the comparison of the Apollo Belvedere with any old Egyptian Horus is all the proof one needs of the superiority of perversion over any normality no matter how cultivated, when it comes to a question of magnificent human achievement. And the ~~artistic~~ spiritual glory of Greece is Euripides, precisely the one who couldn't stomach their callousness and animality and ~~turned~~ tried to get into words ~~his~~ that unhealthy aberration, pity, and the passion for having some other point to existence than the maintenance of a healthy man.

And yet ~~it~~ an adjustment might come again, in other terms, in the future. It might turn out that all these centuries when man was



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learning the alphabet of ~~ethical~~ spiritual ends, the strain was so great that any normal animal functioning was death to it, and only the sick ~~could~~ and deprived could get into the other world. But that might prove to have been just the strait and narrow gate to ~~proper~~ full human development. Anyway if it ever comes, even for a moment of history and on an acre of this earth, it will make over our cosmic picture. For it will be perfectly clear then what man can steer for afterwards, and what has justified, and may again justify, his otherwise disjointed existence.

I confess I can't see how it will be. If you grant that such a ~~development~~ consummation will take into account spiritual achievements like fidelity and pity, then you've got to pray that the pull of the senses and of simple healthy animal indulgences will be bred out. Of course I think we'd want to pay that price if we knew it would buy us the best that's to be had, and so far it's certainly been so—Egyptian art, Beethoven, India, Christ. But one can't help doubting. When I read a handbook of mysticism I'm repelled. When touch seems such a sweet and natural human delight, I resent rooting it out even in favor of my dearest dream of achieving some sort of dignity in living.

—The doubt, it seems to me, must be insuperable as long as an individual's sense demands are normally insistent, and until he has some sort of evidence that the kingdom of heaven ~~can be~~ is best served by a frontal attack upon them.

So far as I can see it will always be a cutting of one's . . . to one's individual measure—whether the measure one's talking of is cultural or that of one artist in the culture. For a long time yet, the part of wisdom would seem to be to avoid ~~claiming one's rights~~ hoping for full development in both directions at once—if the spirit is willing, better try for the flesh's being weak. And if the flesh is superb and functioning healthily, better delight in it as one does in a fish swimming in water and not disturb it with other considerations, however fine. We don't know yet which individual, of the two, will contribute more to the final ~~synthesis~~ achievement, if it ever comes.



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# *On Seeing My Great-Aunt in a Funeral Parlor*

DIANA CHANG

She died away from home
Moved to floral rooms
Hotels of death are near

My aunt lies quiet here
The smiling winter bride
Her wedding bed the earth

My aunt receives the spade
Her stony flesh is frail
Her bones light as at birth

The trees are human veins
The sunset cries anew
Her blood was used in love

The old are girlish now
Going to their grooms
They marry mysteries



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She travels past the light
She leaves us listening
Her speech is young somewhere

We are the sleeping guests
Talking in our night
On her happy dawn

The heart does leap in love
Though the growing spirit hurts
The pain of joy is life.

✪ DIANA CHANG has had poems published in *Poetry*, *Perspective* and THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. She is the author of *The Frontiers of Love*, published by Random House in 1956, and is at present working on her second novel.



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# What Do Animals See?

LORUS J. and MARGERY MILNE

WE RECENTLY WATCHED, among the visitors to the observation gallery atop the Empire State Building, two boys vying with each other as to the make and model of the various automobiles passing along the street below, on the bottom of the city's canyon. Even to tell a man from a woman among the pedestrians 1,250 feet lower than the observation gallery is a good test of eyesight, and the small details of car design upon which the boys were basing their decisions reach the limit of human vision.

For most people, a cantaloupe at 1,250 feet would be the smallest object visible, and an apple or a mouse would be invisibly small. But to a hawk, chasing pigeons past the observation tower, a dime would be obvious on the sidewalk below. A mouse would be recognizable as food. When using the best vision its eyes allow, a hawk has the equivalent of an eight-power magnifier with which to study the ground.

Man has long been aware of the superior visual abilities of many birds. In the heyday of falconry, it was common practice to carry a small caged bird, such as a shrike, on the saddle horn. When the trained hawk was flown, it often rose too high for human eyes to follow it against the blue sky. The falconer could then tell where his tercel was by watching the antics of the caged shrike. The little bird instinctively feared the hawk and kept its head cocked to hold the falcon in view.

The eye of a honeybee is constructed on an entirely different

✪ LORUS and MARGERY MILNE form a husband-and-wife team as naturalists, authors, teachers and photographers. Their sixth and most recent book, *Paths Across the Earth*, tells of the travels of animals and man, and includes many fresh observations made by the Milnes on field studies that have carried them more than 275,000 miles into remote parts of this country, Canada, Latin America and the West Indies.



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plan, and at its best, the bee's vision is much poorer than our worst. For an object to be visible to a bee, it must be relatively huge—one hundred times as large as for a person to see it. At the edge of the bee's visual field, it must be six thousand times as large.

This seems almost incredible when one recalls the small flowers a bee will seek out. Yet the paradox is easily explained. The bee does not see a single flower until very close to it. Again it is the angle at the eye that is the important factor. Since our eyes cannot focus on objects at very close range without a powerful lens to aid us, we tend to overlook the magnifying effect available to animals which do see things from a distance of an inch or less.

Understanding how the insect sees the individual flower does not account for the bee finding the blossom in the first place. This arises through its ability to detect movements. We often catch sight of a moving object "out of the corner of an eye." If it is a sparrow or an insect, the object is far too small to be seen in the extremities of our visual field—until it moves. Then its image shifts from one area of the light-sensitive retina to another, and our eyes report "something" without identifying it. We turn to look at it directly and gain about sixty times as much detail in this way.

Similarly, if something moves in a bee's visual field, the event is reported to the brain. It makes no difference whether the movement is due to a flower waving in the breeze or the bee flying past the flower. If the blossom affects one part of the eye after another at a reasonable rate, movement is reported. The bee comes down for a closer look.

An apple tree in full flower, surrounded by green grass or weeds, is an object a bee can see from a fair distance. The white of the tree contrasts well with the background. At closer range the insect may be able to tell that the flowers are in clusters, with green or dark areas between. If the blossom-bearing branches are agitated by the wind, they are far more attractive to honeybees than a tree sheltered from the breeze by a building. The former will be fuller of insects, which have been flagged down by the extra movement of the white areas across their visual fields.

The honeybee needs movement in order to find food, and gains



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it by flying around. Many hunting animals rely upon patience, crouching motionless until they can detect potential prey. Most snakes, insect-eating lizards, birds that eat insects and rodents, and the predators among mammals have this habit. Unless some small animal moves, a hawk or a cat may not see it at all.

Often animals see objects familiar to us in an astonishing way, paying attention to aspects we consider secondary. Honeybees can be trained to come for drops of sugar water placed on horizontal panes of thin window glass laid over coarse patterns—circles, triangles or squares. If fed repeatedly over a black disc, the bees will ignore open squares, X marks, or even black rings of the same diameter as the disc. Yet they will not be able to distinguish between black discs, black triangles and black squares if all of these have the same perimeter. An X and an open triangle will be confused if they have the identical number of inches of boundary between black and white.

The insect does not recognize shape as such, although it can associate food with a crude measure of a pattern's outline. This is the feature distinguishing a three-petaled flower from a five-petaled one of the same diameter. It accounts for the bee's ability to visit one kind of flower repeatedly, then ignore those blossoms from which the petals have begun to drop.

For higher animals, too, the significance of patterns can be enigmatic. A newly hatched chick will ignore a duck flying overhead, but react with obvious terror to a hawk. The outline of a hawk and duck are not so different. The outstretched wings of each are comparable while gliding. The long neck of the duck matches the long tail of the hawk, and the short tail of the duck the closely held head of the hawk. The difference lies in which precedes—the long extension or the short. This is the chick's inborn cue. If a black cardboard silhouette of a gliding bird is moved across the chicken run on horizontal wires, and the long extension precedes, the chicks are undisturbed—it's only a duck. But if the long extension trails, they scatter and hide—it's a hawk!

Creatures with conspicuous eyes may use them very little. For the meadow mouse in the grass, scent and touch are enough to



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guide it to berries and seeds. Vision serves primarily in warning of the approach of an enemy. To help see in all directions simultaneously, the mouse's eye has a greatly enlarged lens that is so nearly spherical as to give the eye periscopic qualities. There is no need to focus on anything. Instead, the eye sees poorly from horizon to horizon. It is extremely sensitive to any change in the visual field, and warns the mouse to freeze, lest movements or sound betray its position.

The cat and the fox, the hawk and the owl, by contrast, depend largely on vision to locate a meal. They stalk or watch or cruise with seldom a backward glance, for they fear few enemies. Accordingly, their eyes are placed farther forward, and the field of view of each eye overlaps that of the other. This permits binocular vision and doubles the chance of detecting a potential victim.

As long ago as 1773, the English naturalist Gilbert White remarked that "as most nocturnal birds have large eyes and ears, they must have large heads to contain them. Large eyes, I presume, are necessary to collect every ray of light." He was thinking of owls, which do see well at night. The pupils in the big eyes can open wider than those of man, and it seems probable that this type of bird can see in dimmer light than we. Its hearing is so acute, however, that it is difficult to decide how much the owl depends on vision alone in finding active prey at night. Even touch may play a prominent part, since the victims include both mice and smaller creatures such as katydids and earthworms.

Gilbert White did not realize the degree of enlargement of an owl's eyes. In these exceptional birds they are so greatly developed that they cannot be turned in their sockets. Instead they face straight ahead, giving the bird binocular vision but requiring that the entire head be swiveled to change the direction of gaze. Seemingly in consequence, the owl has an extraordinarily flexible neck, capable of turning the head more than a complete circle.

Vision is tremendously important to birds. Indeed, there are no blind birds or even any with degenerate eyes. Yet the huge size of birds' eyes is rarely visible since the lids conceal most of the eyeball. Actually, all available space in the head has been devoted to



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the eyes—even at the expense of cramping the brain, especially the sites of reason and memory. Often the eyeballs are so big that their inner surfaces meet on the mid-line. The ancestors from which birds sprang tended toward better vision and dependence upon instinct. Mammals show the other alternative, with poorer vision in small-bodied kinds and greater dependence upon thinking activities and experience.

We find binocular vision extremely helpful for close work, as when trying to thread a needle. Most birds have a binocular field straight ahead of the beak. Yet if a chick is blindfolded on one side, it will still peck accurately at seeds and worms. Binocular cues seem not to be necessary.

Experimenters have discovered that chicks usually ignore seeds on a cloudy day or in a room with such diffuse lighting that the seeds cast no shadows. Even if the birds can use both eyes, they will often peck at seed-colored areas marked on the floor, if each imitation seed has a black shadow painted to one side of it. The shadow seems to be the feature upon which the bird judges size, distance and shape. Lack of shadows may be the principal reason why so many birds become inactive in dull weather.

Probably most differences in ways of seeing things are related to unlikenesses in eyes. We are aware of the boundary between two gray areas that differ as little as one per cent in the amount of light they reflect. This gives us approximately 500 shades of gray between white and black. But a honeybee must have a 25 per cent difference between two shades of gray to be able to detect the boundary between them. As a result, its eyes can distinguish only about a dozen grays, plus black and white. The little fruit fly *Drosophila*, which has been used so extensively in the study of inheritance, has only three shades of gray in its visual range. The long-necked clam can distinguish even less. Yet it responds to a shadow by contracting its neck and hiding in the muddy beach.

Juncos and catbirds are gray. So are Maltese cats, beech bark, and slate. But otherwise this is not a common shade among natural objects. Most things we see are blue, like sky or larkspur; or green, like chlorophyll; or yellow, like canaries and dandelions; or orange;



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or red. The grays to which our eyes respond are supplemented by about 128 shades of color. Only when we see these colors translated into grays in a "black-and-white" photograph or on a TV screen do we encounter the world as most animals see it.

Despite popular belief, there is nothing especially attractive about a red flag for a bull. Anything waving excites the animal. A white flag or cape would be far more visible to him, and hence more effective, for the bull is color blind. So are the cow and horse, the dog and cat, the pig and sheep. Of all the mammals, only man and some primates enjoy the luxury of color vision.

The day-active birds and most reptiles see color. So do all the fish which have been tested carefully. Frogs and salamanders apparently are color-blind. The use of red flannel to induce bullfrogs to snap at a hook on the end of a line is a fallacy like that of the bull and the red flag.

Bees show the magic ability to distinguish a color from any shade of gray. So do a number of crustaceans, the squid and the octopus. But this is not to say that they see colors as we do. In the case of the honeybee, at least, this is far from true.

Part of the difference in the colors an animal can see lies in the extent of its spectrum. One of the most convincing demonstrations on insects was performed a few years ago by the British entomologist, H. Eltringham. He caught several of the common butterflies known as Tortoise-shells, in the pattern of whose wings red is conspicuous. Using a clear red lacquer, he painted over their compound eyes, fitting them in this way with harmless red glasses. Then he let them free, and noted that they flew as well as usual. Apparently the Tortoise-shell could see with red light, which alone could pass through the red lacquer. When the same test was tried on the white butterfly known as the Large Cabbage, the insect flew aimlessly, with reactions like those of a blind insect. These observations match the behavior of the two butterflies, since the Tortoise-shell visits red flowers, whereas the Large Cabbage rarely does so. Apparently it is unable to see them as more than black shadows.

Many fishermen, who are adept at catching large earthworms for bait when these "night crawlers" expose themselves on lawns



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in darkness, know that a red lantern or red flashlight lets human eyes see the worms easily without disturbing the quarry. Earthworms are blind to red light, although their skins are sensitive to any other part of the spectrum.

Recently, H. N. Southern of Oxford University Botanic Gardens used a similar method in watching a family of owls. He hung a red lamp close to the nest. Then he sat comfortably at a distance with field glasses, recording the kind of food the parents brought their young on each trip. The owls saw no light, and behaved as though in complete darkness. Yet Mr. Southern was able to discover that earthworms formed an important part of the birds' diet—a fact never before suspected.

It is easy to assume that because human vision is excellent we can see anything that any other animal can—and perhaps a bit more. Yet for many insects the solar spectrum includes a bright band beyond the blue and violet, in the ultraviolet. To a honeybee or housefly, this is the most stimulating part of sunlight. Objects that reflect ultraviolet are far brighter to most insects than objects that do not. Human beings fail to see these differences, since the slightly yellowish lens of our eye absorbs light energy at such short wave lengths.

We can, however, use photographic film sensitive to ultraviolet and learn what an insect sees by means of this component of sunlight. Most things that reflect light visible to us also reflect some ultraviolet. A few provide surprises. The common yellow daisy, for example, absorbs ultraviolet except at the tips of the petals, which are intensely reflecting. In consequence, this flower is visible to insects as a halo of bright ultraviolet spots surrounding the central cone where the nectar and pollen wait.

Even some insects show strange features in ultraviolet. Both the male and female Luna moth are a pastel green to our eyes. But in the ultraviolet, she is a blonde and he a brunet. These differences must be visible to the moths whenever they see one another in daylight.

"By night all cats are gray" is an old proverb, and still a perfectly true statement. Neither we nor any other creature can see



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colors in very dim light, such as under the moonless night sky. Of course, all cats are gray at any time to another cat. But the cat's eyes still see a great deal at night. This is partly through possession of an extremely sensitive retina, and it depends somewhat on the fact that the cat's eye possesses an internal mirror. Light entering the eye has one opportunity as it goes in to be absorbed and stimulate vision. If it misses being absorbed, it is reflected by the mirror and sent through the retina again—giving it another chance. In dim illumination this represents a one hundred per cent gain for the cat.

The presence of a mirror in a cat's eye accounts for the eye-shine familiar whenever a strong light is shone into the animal's eyes at night. The beam from a flashlamp enters the wide-open pupil and is reflected back again with such intensity that the cat's eyes seem to glow. A similar mirror accounts for the orange eye-shine of bears, the opalescent green of a bullfrog, the bright yellow of a raccoon, and the ruby red of alligators.

Cats of most kinds are like alligators in preferring to prowl for food at night, making full use of their sensitive eyes; but they enjoy basking in the sun as well. To protect the retina from the glare of daylight, each of these animals has a slit pupil. This consists of a pair of curtains that can be drawn apart widely, admitting all light available. By day they can be pulled together until, as in a cat's eye, only a pinhole above and one below represent the slit.

The circular pupil in our own eyes is operated by fine muscles surrounding it in the iris, the colored part of the eye. When the iris opens, these muscles are stretched. But when the muscles contract to close the pupil, they are in their own way. The limit of closure is reached with the pupil still open nearly one-eighth of an inch. This is fine for a man who sleeps at night, but would never do for a cat.

It seems to be an engineering impossibility to ask a small eye to see well both by day and by night. Perhaps as a result, bats and many snakes which are abroad in darkness seem to ignore vision altogether. Another engineering problem is for an animal to be able to see both in air and under water. We represent one extreme, and a fish or a penguin the other. In air, we see objects clearly that



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are brought into focus through the combined action of the lens of the eye and of the curved cornea exposed through our tears. Under water, the focusing action of the cornea vanishes. The lens alone is not sufficient to bring objects into focus, and we find ourselves hopelessly farsighted. For this reason we prefer to wear diving goggles or a mask, and keep our tear-wet corneas in air.

The fish and the penguin which chases it have such strong focusing action in the lens of the eye that they need no help from the cornea to see while swimming. But as soon as a penguin emerges into air, the added focusing action of its corneas makes it pathetically nearsighted. It has difficulty distinguishing a stone from an egg at its own feet.

A few creatures are fitted especially for seeing both in air and in water. The black whirligig beetles which spin and cruise on the surface of ponds and lakes have divided compound eyes. One half of each eye faces into the water and is always wet. The other half looks into air, and is located above the water line. The four-eyed fish of Central and South American rivers is similarly equipped. Each eye has two pupils, and the fish swims at the surface with the upper pupils exposed to air, the lower ones looking into the water. In this way it is able to keep apprised of events all around it. The same lens serves both pupils, and the proportions of the eye are correct to allow clear vision through both of them simultaneously.

Ordinary fish have a strange view of the world. Through the water they see objects on the bottom. Directly above them (and to all sides of vertical for an angle of exactly 48.8 degrees), they look through a window bounded by the horizon. This is due to the bending of light as it enters water. Surrounding this window is a reflection of the bottom, poor or good depending upon how much the wind ruffles the water surface. So used to this queer field of view is any fish that it keeps close watch on every detail: the worm on a hook, tethered by a line; the kingfisher hovering directly overhead; the snail creeping along the bottom—all are of importance.

There is good reason to doubt that a fish can see much color in an angler's dry fly silhouetted against the sky. But its shape and its action are highly visible. So too may be the line that links the



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fly to the angler's rod. Here again is a measure of ability to see well. Just as our eyes must be supplied with larger and larger type if we are to read into twilight, so too the fisherman may use a coarser and stronger leader on his hook after sunset. As the light dims, the fish is unable to distinguish a string against the sky.

Long before the invention of clocks, these changes were evident to the peoples of the Near East. Day has come to a Mohammedan minaret when the faithful can distinguish a gray thread from a white, night when neither thread can be seen at all.

The Arabs knew too, from living in close association with their horses, that the animal's prowess in the dark is outstanding—matching the fact that it has the largest eyes of any terrestrial creature. The desert dwellers invented a fable on the subject. According to the story, the lion and the horse got into an argument as to which of them could see better. Finally they called in some neutral judges and asked to be given problems that would settle the dispute. The best the lion could do was to locate a white pearl in a saucer of milk. But the horse picked out a black pearl among coal. The judges decided in favor of the horse.



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# The New England Conscience

PERRY MILLER

IN 1891 HENRY ADAMS took what subsequently became a famous trip to the South Seas with John La Farge. Tahiti was still as unspoiled, as lush, as sensuous, as when Melville advertised the region through *Typee* in 1846. La Farge, being an artist, gave himself up entirely to the warmth, the color, the fragrance; but Adams went on dissecting his mind, analyzing his impressions into abstractions, and commenting at length on his inability to surrender himself. "Adams," at last exclaimed the irritated La Farge, "You reason too much." La Farge should, the author later observed, "have blamed Adams for being born in Boston."

Take any odd lot of New Englanders coming from the Puritan stock—Winthrop, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, all the Adamses, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Thoreau, Senator Leverett Saltonstall—and what do they have in common, despite differing philosophies or the contrasts among their centuries? The answer follows quickly: they are possessed by what has come to be stereotyped, both in New England and in more pagan areas, as the "New England Conscience." Other sections of the country and other cultures of the world exhibit, I have no doubt, scores of conscientious men and women; only in New England is there a Conscience so standardized that it must be capitalized. As John Quincy Adams succinctly put it, "New England was the colony of Conscience."

The conventional observation is that this habit of obeying with slavish fidelity—some term it a morbid curiosity—the inner promptings of rectitude goes back to the Puritan migration of the seventeenth century. However, other Calvinist peoples came to other colonies, and the great Scotch-Irish clans who marched to the Pennsylvania frontier and down the valleys into Georgia carried

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with them a respect for conscience as militant as any cherished in New England. If one puts John C. Calhoun, who was born of these pioneers, beside Daniel Webster, the "glorious" keeper of the New England political conscience, one would hesitate a long while before arguing that Webster was more in the clutch of moral principle than the gaunt Carolinian. In fact, there were many, including some New Englanders, who would swear that when he came to his personal finances, Webster simply had no conscience whatsoever!

The first remark to be made, therefore, is that the New Englanders so early and persistently advertised their unique devotion to the faculty, and so ordered their society as to enforce its obligations upon every department of life, that in effect they persuaded themselves (and so others) that they had a monopoly of the article. Having thus convinced themselves, they were obliged to display the habit long after they had abandoned the Calvinism of the founders. Indeed, if today one wishes to study the configurations of New England's Conscience, one is more apt to find prime specimens among "liberal" Unitarians, or even among those professing to have outgrown religion altogether, than among the "orthodox" communions.

The primitive order of New England was an ingenious method for institutionalizing what had been known in medieval England as "the Agenbite of Inwyt." This can legitimately be translated merely as "remorse of conscience"; but in the language of the people it had a more savage connotation: the gnawing bite of that wit which festers within a man and which he cannot control. The Puritans set up churches in the form we call "Congregational." The primary requirement was that a candidate could not become a member of a church until he had relentlessly examined his soul and discovered therein fairly certain evidence of his regeneration; then he had to submit to examination by the church or at least by the elders, experts in this probing of the psyche, until they could attest that he was at least a "visible saint." (They never permitted themselves to say of anybody that he positively *was* a saint before his funeral sermon had been pronounced.) Since all those concerned worked every minute of their lives in the Great Task-



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master's eyes, the inspection was conducted through His and not through their own eyes.

These settlers brought in large quantities copies of a handbook that for two centuries was to guide them and their posterity through the labyrinth of "inwyt"—*Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof,* by William Ames (it was published originally in Latin around 1620, but an immensely popular English translation appeared in 1643). He had been the teacher, the revered mentor, of many of the first generation of divines, and for years, from his professorship in Franeker, had educated Protestant Europe in the English version of the religious conscience. He died just as he was about to embark for Boston in 1633; had he come and been able to work there, his would be the great name we remember as originating the Puritan intellect in America, and Mather, Cotton, Hooker and Shepard would figure as his satellites. But although his body did not migrate, his book did. It was the standard text at Harvard and Yale; it was in every minister's study; and thousands of unmetaphysical yeomen had their perplexities resolved or the precise character of their trespass defined according to the minute regulations of Ames's casuistry.

Ames put his central thesis, around which the massive tome revolves, with terrifying simplicity: the individual conscience "is man's judgment of himself according to the judgment of God of him." This is to say that it would do the visible saint no good to plead extenuating circumstances, the frailty of his flesh, ignorance or stupidity, or to try to even the balance by citing his manifold good deeds against just one mistake. His was the task of judging himself remorselessly by the divine rule. Moreover, he was to submit himself to such a moral autopsy not only *after* he had done or not done something, but also *before* it. For conscience, as Ames unflinchingly asserted, is not a contemplative exercise but a practical engine "whereby man applies to himself, to direct his will, to that which is either good or evil to him."

There were critics at the time, as there have been many more in later centuries, who argued that an ecclesiastical system embodying this sort of ethical imperative would succeed only in putting



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conscience to sleep. Once the trembling candidate was accepted by the church, would he not calculate that he was safe and cease to tremble? Indeed, the great revivals, that of Jonathan Edwards in 1740 and that in Connecticut around 1800, arose out of deep conviction that the churches had indeed become complacent. In New England, revivalists always endeavored to distress the historic conscience so that it would once more go to work.

Yet despite these intermittent periods of "deadness," there was always a maggot in the New England brain that gnawed at security, for nobody, not even Cotton Mather himself, was allowed to be absolutely assured of his election. Indeed, the immense diary that Cotton Mather kept every day of his adult existence is a search of his own condition that a modern reader finds extravagant to the point of becoming wildly ludicrous. "Many, many Things I have to do," runs a typical entry, "Many Things of the greatest Consequence. I shall either leave them undone, or do them not well, or miss the Time of doing them, if I do not with much Resignation unto it, obtain the heavenly Conduct." A man thus perpetually driven might develop, as Cotton Mather conspicuously did, disagreeable manners of self-righteousness and censoriousness, but he would live without inward peace. What is more, Mather did not want such peace. He would have despised it.

For in the New England doctrine, as developed from Ames, that was an elaboration of the central position that to those outside the Puritan pale, whether in England or Virginia, seemed to put the seal of approval upon cultivated hypocrisy, but made the search of soul an unending torment to the Puritans. The true goodness or sinfulness of a deed was not a matter of external conditions—giving to charities, rescuing a drowning boy, conducting a profitable voyage, accepting a token from one who had been aided—but consisted wholly in the intention. "Outward action without the inward," said Ames, "is not properly good or evil," because the merit of an act, whatever the circumstances, "depends first and foremost upon the will, which is often accepted with God, though outward work itself be absent." So it might be legitimate in a thousand situations to employ some form of deceit; the Old Testament tells of



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many cases in which the elect admirably hoodwinked the enemies of Jehovah. But Ames and his Puritan disciples, into the twentieth century, always contended that they never tolerated a double standard in morality—never permitted a distinction to be made between the code for politics or business and the one for private behavior. Therefore, they were bound to be all the more racked by the question of whether their motive was good when they closed a deal, sold an article, fired a workman or foreclosed a mortgage. If the motive is good, the rest does not matter, for as Ames had sagely instructed them, "A lie is properly a testimony whereby one pronounces otherwise than is in his heart." As John Cotton explained to Roger Williams, he was exiled from Massachusetts Bay not for obeying his conscience but for going against what Cotton and the authorities really knew was his conscience. If there be an element of cynicism in this program, then it is there due to deliberate calculation. As a modern child of the Puritans, a man much in the public view, recently expounded it, the crime is not that one steals but rather the enjoying what one has stolen.

So, because the saint or the would-be saint had constantly to maintain the closest scrutiny of himself, New Englanders became the most prolific keepers of diaries in all history. Here again the habit persisted after the theological incentives weakened. Every Adams, we know, kept a diary, and a great scholarly enterprise is now under way to present the public eventually with every last bit of their pertinacious self-criticism. The journals of Emerson and Thoreau are simply the greatest masterpieces of this vast array of New England introspection. *The Education of Henry Adams* is another of these Puritan introversions, written under the compulsion of a conscience that can never rest until it exhausts its victim. If, as an unsympathetic reader once suggested, the title of the book ought to be *The Unfortunate Relationship of the Universe to Me,* then the joke is applicable to all these manifestations of the New England Conscience. As Henry Thoreau summarized the issue, "We do not attend to larks and bluebirds so leisurely but that conscience is as erect as the attitude of the listener. The man of principle gets never a holiday."



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Among the most monumental of Puritan diaries is that of a contemporary of Cotton Mather, sometimes his friend and often his opponent, Samuel Sewall. He was a less hysterical being than Mather, so that his self-portraiture is more ingratiating. Although he never received any formal legal training, he ended his days as Chief Justice of Massachusetts and, from all accounts, a good one. Yet when he was younger and less skilled in the law, he had the misfortune to be appointed to the improvised court that in 1692 condemned the Salem "witches." The legend goes that the presiding judge, William Stoughton, never repented his part in the judicial massacre. One of the most charming dormitories in the Harvard Yard is named for him; I know not what effect, if any, a year's residence therein has on the consciences of modern freshmen. But within five years of this colossal blunder, Sewall realized how ghastly it was. He gave a statement to his minister, Samuel Willard, asking that it be read from the pulpit of the Old South Church while Sewall stood in shame before the congregation. Openly Sewall took the blame of it upon himself and asked for the prayers of men, that God would pardon his crime and not visit deserved punishment for his stupidity "upon the Land."

Assuredly, the New England Conscience has its angular, stifling, inhuman aspects, as well as its uncanny refuges, and frequently it seems no more than a neurotic tic. Hundreds of generous, gay-spirited children of the Puritans have, like Shaw's Devil's Disciple, so reacted against it as to go over to the enemy. But if there is a nobility, a dignity in it, the tableau of Samuel Sewall, substantial citizen, standing in humiliation before his church while his accusation against himself is made public, symbolizes its majesty. Also, in its deliberateness and stateliness, it points up the difference between the workings of the New England Conscience in its purity from those perfervid confessions of wrongdoing excited by nineteenth-century revivalists in Kentucky or in Chicago. What then must particularly be noted is that Sewall makes no attempt to gloss over anything, to plead the excitement of the moment or his loyalty to Stoughton. He is thinking hard of others, of what his guilt may bring upon his country in the way of retribution. But



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above all, he is passing upon himself such a judgment as no earthly tribunal could phrase.

In the same year of his confession, 1697, Sewall also published an esoteric tract on the fulfillment of prophecies. Midway into it, he chanced to mention Plum Island, where he had played as a boy and where he still visited in meditative solitude. At the sound of the name, he lost track of his sterile logic for a moment and launched into a paean to the sensual beauties of the place: it is a chant upon the sweetness, the salmon and sturgeon in "the streams of Merrimack," the seafowl that annually visit the places of their acquaintance, the cattle fed "with the Grass growing in the Medows, which do humbly bow down themselves before Turkie-Hill." So perhaps we get somewhat nearer the essence of the New England Conscience as we realize that the unsparing lash of judging according to God's judgment developed from intensity to intensity along with the New Englander's discipline in learning love for his land.

The conscience of Henry Thoreau burst into flame upon the news of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Nothing in the sheer recklessness of the adventure, nothing of its brutality or lawlessness, inhibited Thoreau's exultation. Rather, for Thoreau all the considerations that would persuade reasonable men of its utter folly proved only the more conclusively that Brown acted solely from the dictate of conscience. Yet the secret cry of the Puritan conscientiousness, as it had become adapted to New England, came out in Thoreau's indictment of his compatriots: "Our foes are in our midst and all about us. There is hardly a house but is divided against itself, for our foe is the all but universal woodenness of both head and heart, the want of vitality in man, which is the effect of our vice."

However, what most puzzles the outside world is not the moment when an exacerbated Edwards or an infuriated Thoreau let the violence of New England's Conscience erupt, but the steady way in which, day after day, it regulates ordinary transactions. In 1936 George Santayana unexpectedly became a best seller with a novel called *The Last Puritan*. It was read as a caustic attack on the



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New England Conscience, and its popularity must be taken as evidence that a great part of the public, including some in New England, welcomed this surgical operation upon the incubus. In the person of his "hero," Oliver Alden, Santayana incarnated those fears of life and love, the emotional sterility, the doctrinaire joylessness, that for all the years of his enforced sojourn at Harvard had disgusted him, until at last in 1912 he was able to escape permanently to Europe and to end his days in Rome where, as he told me and others, he was never troubled by the slightest twinges of the virus. Yet in his preface, Santayana constructed a dialogue with his young Italian friend, who in everything is the opposite of the Bostonian, in which even they find a perverse sublimity in Alden's conscientiousness. He was a millionaire, says Santayana, and yet scrupulously simple and silently heroic; Mediterranean types "can't help admiring people purer than ourselves, more willing to pluck out the eye that offends them, even if it is the eye of beauty, and to enter halt and lame into the kingdom of singlemindedness." This is a tribute, the more eloquent for being a reluctant one, to the persistence of a mentality from the time of Cotton Mather into the twentieth century.

What often amuses the Yankee in such external appraisals as Santayana's—and for all the years Santayana lived in the neighborhood of Boston, he remained an outsider—is his inability to cope with another dimension of this localized conscience that was present at the beginning, but that expanded with the centuries of adaptation to the soil: that is, its fondness for being amused with itself. Samuel Sewall in narrating his courtship of the Widow Winthrop, bringing her his ridiculous "Sugar Almonds" that cost three shillings the pound and attempting his elephantine gallantries, is quite aware of the comic figure he cuts. In our own time, two highly conscientious poets have demonstrated both in their techniques and subject matter a concern about inward judgments combined with a love of the land, and yet they have taken care to relieve the tension with humor. Robert Frost's admonition about the need of being versed in country things before one supposes that phoebes weep is a warning against allowing the conscience to be contaminated by sentimentality. Edwin Arlington Robinson rang many



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changes on and within the paradox, and summed it up succinctly in a sonnet boldly called "New England." Here "the wind is always north-north-east," "children learn to walk on frozen toes" and to envy those who elsewhere shamelessly enjoy a lyric feast:

> Joy shivers in the corner where she knits
> And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,
> Cheerful as when she tortured into fits
> The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

Younger poets in the New England heritage have even more radically than Frost and Robinson resented the tyranny of rocking-chair conscience, and so have succeeded primarily in torturing cats with more exquisite care. One thinks especially of E. E. Cummings and Robert Lowell.

One may interject at this point that it is plausible that writers would retain a sense of the Puritan heritage and make literary capital out of its patterns of conscience. The serious question, sociologically speaking, is whether, as New England has moved into modern prosperity and materiality, as it has become only one region within a vast industrial complex, as it has also become populated by supermarkets, there is any reason for the casual citizen to give thought to an ethic of abstinence, self-denial and worry about internal motives.

Assuredly, the hordes of foreign tourists who come every summer get little chance to perceive the New England Conscience in action. The one hint they are likely to receive is the latent hostility of small-town tradesmen against the "summer folk," which, the tourist notes, is perfectly combined with the natives' determination to get as much profit as possible out of the season. And, as all the world knows, the old Yankee stock does not control the political life of the area, only a part of its business life and by no means all of its social parade. As a result, it has been argued that the New England Conscience must be a thing of the past, obliterated by the automobile and rooted out by Freud.

Yet, let us think again of Sewall standing in the Old South Church. There is a proud assumption implicit in his self-abasement: he has this duty to perform for the sake both of the com-



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munity and his own judgment of himself. Pre-eminence spells responsibility. In 1842 Charles Dickens recorded his amazed delight with the public institutions of Boston, finding them "as nearly perfect, as the most considerate wisdom, benevolence, and humanity, can make them." The one thing in all America upon which he could heap unqualified praise was the Perkins School for the Blind. Without making invidious comparisons, I think it may be suggested that in Boston today charity is a major industry. And as for business, the department that has most consistently remained in the hands of descendants of the New England Conscience is the trust funds—the handling of other people's money by those who, from a long accumulation of wisdom and anguish, have the skill and the dedication.

It is a matter of history that New England did produce out of its Puritan ranks a considerable number of rascals. Many of them, like the proverbial sellers of wooden nutmegs, wrapped themselves in the toga of a special conscience and argued that their frauds were not evil because their hearts were pure. Until fairly recently, the sale of votes in rural elections was conducted with so open and callous a disregard of rudimentary decency as to bring the blush of shame to any leader of the toughest ward in one of our cities. Yet even this bribery was attended with a scrupulous regard for conscience, and once a farmer sold his vote, he stayed bought.

However, as for the New England Conscience still persisting with enough vitality to stand up against a sinful world, as for its not being intimidated by the rapaciousness of our century, we have constantly fresh examples. I might, for instance, cite the conduct of Senator Warren Austin at the United Nations, and Mr. Austin comes from Vermont, where the New England Conscience is reputed to survive in all its pristine severity. But also, I might mention another exemplification that was recently put on view for the whole nation to marvel at: the bearing of Mr. Joseph Welch at the Army-McCarthy hearings. Mr. Welch practices law in Boston; it is to be remembered, however, that he was born in Iowa. That particular conscience created in New England by the geographical isolation of the region and solidified under the pressure of the climate eventually proved to be an exportable commodity.



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# POEMS

RUTHVEN TODD

## *The Geese*

Like a singed black lash, curled in the embers
Of the night, spiraling from opening day, the skein
Of Canada geese appears. Too distant for numbers
It seems one bar, half hidden in splintering rain.
Slowly, though, the surge of the great birds flying,
Ploughing invisible furrows in the morning air,
Brings them clear, distinct in the dawn's graying,
Curved wings thrashing, necks stretched before.

High, out of range of the skilled gunner's shot,
They circle, their honks borne faintly on the wind,
Inspecting the decoys with which the hunters plot
To bring them in. Dissatisfaction now will send
Them on, obedient to their vast leader's call;
A team of aerial swimmers beating out their crawl.

## *The Farm, Early Morning*

The cattle congregate
Beside the looming barn; a fog
Of breath distills in the frost-bound air.
Slowly light breaks the duck-egg
Sky. The chickens repeat

Their morning litany. Cat-ice
Slicks the pond's unruffled water,
And the still silence presses on the ear
As if to say that now or later
Motion in this place



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Will harm the quiet.
But for this long moment I
Look through the mantilla of twigs here,
Crying halt to dawning day,
Enjoying my eyot

In spating time.
Now I am just a pair of eyes
Watching, and a sleepy mind aware
Of approaching winter days
Of snow to come.

## *Pruning Vines*

No plant so dead. Each straggling vine
Sleeps as if it never could again
Bear berried bunches. The dark wood
Lies lifeless on the trellis, seeming dead
Until the secateurs slice through the cane;

There, ovaled in the brown, a pallid green
Shows where sap sleeps, and watery stain
On shears denies the statement made:
No plant so dead.

Now the skillful hand must prune
Each vine back to the bare skeleton,
Discard the prodigality displayed
By summer's growth. Appearance lied.
Touch refutes what eye thought plain:
No plant so dead.

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# Our Serious Comics

KENNETH E. EBLE

IF CRITICS OF AMERICAN CULTURE had not looked at comic strips for so long a time with the sightless eyes of Orphan Annie, they might have noticed the steady drift of a once vigorous comic art into an earnest but deadly seriousness. More and more comic strips of recent years have taken upon themselves the prepackaged, sentiment-filled, solution-attached problems that line the American road of life. A sizable portion of today's American newspaper comic section is no longer comic; many of our funnies are no longer funny. With the drift of the comic strips into the domain of daytime radio and TV, American popular arts can now offer soap opera from cradle to grave.

My observations on this subject are subscholarly. Although I am a teacher of literature, my attention to the comics has not been motivated by an eye fixed upon the Chester Gould Chair of Sunday Funnies. Quite frankly, they amuse me—or did; and I am exposing my children to them—or was. But the trend that I intend to discuss here makes me fear that I may have to curtail our daily readings. We got to know Rughead, the Shmoos, even Punjab and the Asp, with little difficulty; but I am not sure that I want to introduce them to Juliet Jones, Rex Morgan, M.D., or a Mary Worth who should have remained at the apple stand.

During the recent past, my children and I—and who knows how many million others—have learned about juvenile delinquency (*Judge Parker*), alcoholism, subversion and attempted seduction (*Smilin' Jack*), espionage (*Terry and the Pirates*), amnesia (*Brenda Starr*), cancer quacks (*Rex Morgan, M.D.*), business ethics (*Judd Saxon*), divorce and its effects upon the children (*Dondi,*

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*Mary Worth, Judge Parker*), the conflicting demands of marriage and a career (*Mary Worth, On Stage*), the venality of actors' agents and alcoholic tutors (*On Stage, Dondi*), juvenile blackmail, adult extortion, foster parenthood, civilian antagonism to the military, the rehabilitation of female ex-convicts, and polo (*Steve Canyon*). In addition, I have found myself involved in a host of real and imagined illnesses ranging from paranoia to coronary thrombosis, and I have picked up more than a little insight into world affairs. In *Orphan Annie*, for example, that reincarnation of the Old West, Sam Sundown, was really Uncle Sam; Wolf Gnaf, the villain, was certainly the faithful likeness of Khrushchev; and Daddy Warbucks fitfully reappeared looking more like Dwight D. Eisenhower each time. The current political lesson intended by Annie's creator, Harold Gray, seems to be that in international affairs, as in video westerns, might makes right.

If it were not for such atavistic survivors as Ma Licious (*Orphan Annie*), Miss Egghead (*Dick Tracy*), and new funnies like *Gordo* and *Peanuts*, I might start Sunday mornings with the financial pages or the obituaries.

To be sure, a trip through the funnies these days is not unrelieved concentration upon man's soapy miseries. In the paper I read, I can still find, in addition to the strips I have mentioned, *Blondie, Nancy, Li'l Abner, Moon Mullins, Donald Duck, Gordo, Peanuts* and *Mickey Mouse*—all of which are "funny" funnies. What I am talking about is not exactly a new phenomenon, although its growing popularity probably is.

A large portion, perhaps a majority, of American comics has always dealt with realistic characters in situations that closely reflect the times. Comic-strip fanciers point with pride to Frank King and his Skeezix, the first comic-strip character to grow to manhood before the public's eyes. King has been likened to Jane Austen in his calm and perceptive delineation of domestic life. George McManus' *Bringing Up Father* found the social problems of an Irish laborer grown rich to be a popular situation for the urban readers of 1913, when the strip began. When the hillbilly became a popular figure in the American consciousness in the thirties, Snuffy Smith was added to *Barney Google*, a strip which began in 1919.



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The appearance of sputnik gave new life to *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon*, whose space wars had paled before the earthly battles of World War II. The continuing story line was one of the first developments in the comic strip—Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* in 1908 was the first of note—and since that time cartoonists have drawn much of their material from the people and the events of the day.

Nevertheless, although the departure from the single gag picture or panel altered the nature of the comics somewhat, it did not change the basic assumption that gave these cartoons the name "funnies." Whether they drew upon real life or not, whether they reflected social conditions or merely the cartoonist's wild imagination, the daily sequence was designedly comic. Comic devices were varied and often violent. Slapstick, burlesque, satire, caricature, fantasy, coarse gags and polite domestic whimsey—the cartoonists used, and often used well, whatever would make readers laugh. In recent years, however, there have appeared an increasing number of strips that are seldom humorous either in intent or in execution. These are much closer to *Stella Dallas* than to *Moon Mullins*, and soap opera is as singularly solemn in the comic pages as on the radio. Occasionally, the cartoonist may manage a joke on Sunday, when he must break the continuity somewhat to hold both daily and Sunday readers. But for the most part, day after day, life's problems catch the characters in their grip, and such lives and such problems afford few laughs.

*Mary Worth*, now written by Allen Saunders and drawn by Ken Ernst, will serve to define the nature of these "serious" comics. The strip began in 1932 as *Apple Mary*, and at that time was like other realistic strips that found sentiment, some tears and folksy humor popular during the Depression. Its original artist, Martha Orr, gave up the strip before the war, and the direction taken from that time on was toward the kind of seriousness that distinguishes a host of present-day comics. *Mary Worth* now has reached a horrifying perfection toward which its followers are yet tending. These strips have in common excellent draftsmanship; accurate notation of current fads and fashions; facile shifting from sequence to sequence; tidy, well-plotted story lines; and overweening seriousness toward life's bitter sweetnesses or sweet bitternesses. Dialogue, situa-



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tion, characterization tend to be smart, sophisticated and generally banal. Mary, once a character in her own right, has given way to a succession of fashionably neurotic rich girls, strong-willed but unloved career women, bachelor girls with aspirations, married women with problems, and suitable masculine counterparts. Mary now plays a kibitzer's role, a Sunday Ma Perkins dispensing oblique advice and shrewdly assessing human motives and character.

In this kind of comic strip, America's unfunny comics become one with the popular novel, the radio serial, the "Hollywood" movie and much TV drama. The ingredients are common to all: the milieu of the upper middle class to which the lower middle can easily rise; the clichés of American romantic love; the continual sexual titillation; the hidden secrets that ultimately explain away bad manners, neurotic behavior or halitosis; the full delineation of life's problems and their solutions; the straight-nosed, firm-chinned heroes; the high-fashion, provocative, yet sweetly wholesome heroines—and all of them are directed toward the wish fulfillments of a mass audience.

The syndicates that merchandise the comic strips do not disguise the fact that many of their serial cartoons are no longer comic. The Hall Syndicate makes a distinction between "Daily Comic Strips," including *Pogo*, *Dilly* and *The Ryatts*, and "Daily Story Strips," *David Crane* and *Mark Trail*. King Features makes a further distinction: *Rip Kirby*, *The Phantom* and *Johnny Hazard* are "Adventure Strips"; *Bringing Up Father*, *Hi and Lois*, *Henry*, *Blondie*, *Beetle Bailey* and *Grandma* are "Comic Strips"; *Steve Canyon*, *The Heart of Juliet Jones* and *Judd Saxon* are "Romance and Adventure Strips." This trade distinction points to a recognizable group of serious comics—what King Features calls romance and adventure strips might be as accurately labeled "soap opera."

If we can believe the syndicate's advertising, *On Stage*, a rendering of adventures in the pattern of *Helen Trent* or *Mary Noble, Backstage Wife*, has caught on faster and more widely than any other recent strip. Rex Morgan, M.D., who began his career in May, 1948, has a large following, as has his stable mate (to use an inelegant word for such an elegant individual), Judge Parker. Last



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spring the National Cartoonists Society named Hal Foster cartoonist of the year. Foster draws *Prince Valiant*, a soap-opera version of King Arthur's Court in which adolescent romance and Queen Aleta's longing for the social season at Camelot alternate with blood and plunder. Because syndicates, like radio and television networks, follow the principles that what succeeds for one must be copied by the competing syndicates, and that what succeeds as an original can sustain any number of good and bad imitations, a flood of serious comics may be upon us.

A run-down of the offerings in cartoon features between 1946 and 1958 seems to bear out my contention that soap opera is spilling over into the funnies. (It is obvious, of course, that syndicates have found soap opera fare—gossip columns, lonelyhearts columns, inspiration columns, child guidance, medical advice and the like—staples of their trade.) In 1946, according to my analysis of *Editor & Publisher*'s annual directory of syndicated features, there were some nine strips that did not depend upon the daily gag, comic caricature or high adventure for their impact. There were the established ones: *Mary Worth, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Jane Arden, Orphan Annie* and *Brenda Starr*; and some newcomers: *The Diary of Dr. Hayward, Judge Wright* and *Surgeon Stone*. By 1958, these last three had disappeared. However, all the old ones were still active, and at least ten new ones seemed to be gaining as wide a following. Among these, in addition to the ones I have mentioned, are *Big Ben Bolt* ("heavyweight champion, Harvard-educated Ben Bolt"), *The Heart of Juliet Jones* ("the superbly drawn, masterfully written story of a father, his two beautiful daughters and the people who affect their lives"), *Judd Saxon* ("an American success story, Judd Saxon is itself the new smash comic page hit of the year")—I am quoting from syndicate advertising—*Steve Roper*, an offshoot from an earlier strip, and *Dr. Guy Bennet*.

My list does not include many realistic story strips that are not so acutely serious, so cloyingly sentimental or so problem-oriented as the kind I have mentioned. The adventures of such worthies as Rip Kirby, Jeff Cobb or Kerry Drake, in the strips bearing these names, frequently relieve the insistent tedium of superficial realism. Others, such as *Joe Palooka, Mickey Finn, Gasoline Alley,*



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*Abbie and Slats* and *Gordo*, mix a realistic story line with the comic caricature of the early comic strips or possess a subtle humor and satire in keeping with a comic point of view. My classifications do not pretend to be complete or definitive. I have not followed all the three hundred comics of one kind or another listed in the current *Editor & Publisher* directory; and with strips appearing from the *Stockholms-Tidningen* to the Sydney, Australia, *Daily Mirror*, I may have missed one or two. Still, I think my conclusions are accurate enough. Publishers Syndicate, as alert as any syndicate to changing tastes in comics, has added *Rex Morgan, M.D.* and *Judge Parker* to *Mary Worth* within the past ten years. Other major syndicates are not far behind. And even such an ambitious strip as *Steve Canyon*, once made entertaining by the presence of manly heroes, fascinating women and exotic settings, has days when Mary Worth could drift into Steve Canyon's bivouac easily enough.

Coulton Waugh, whose book *The Comics* is the only substantial piece on this form of popular art and story, noted the rise of this kind of strip around the beginning of World War II. He called attention to the work of "a school of sharp, sophisticated inkslingers," of which Milton Caniff was the most celebrated, and which included such strips as *Claire Voyant*, *Debbie Dean* and *Bruce Gentry* (all of which are now out of existence), *Scorchy Smith*, *Secret Agent X-9*, *Johnny Hazard*, *Kerry Drake* and *Mary Worth*. In 1947, he was optimistic that the "funny" comic strips were making a comeback after the war. He had not yet observed that the popularity of the soap-opera strip was moving both the gag strip and some of the established story strips out of the limited space available in the average daily or Sunday newspaper.

If comic strips have moved into the realm of soap opera and, for that matter, if they are no longer comic, what of it? My own distress is chiefly that of seeing the incitements to laughter decreased by one. Since *The Spirit of the Times*, even since silent movies and the early days of radio, there has been a steady attrition of American humor. Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, the writers and lecturers who gave American humor an international reputation, would find a restricted market either in mass



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magazines or on the lecture platform today. Radio, whose celebrated gagmen preserved some of this tradition of American verbal humor, has had no fresh comic talent to speak of in twenty years. There are, with the exception of Danny Kaye, no first-rate comic artists active in Hollywood today. Television has exhausted every comedian it has introduced. The comic strip, as a form of comedy, has had a considerable period of real humor and a particular comic charm that continues to reassert itself at fitful intervals in a *Barnaby*, a *Pogo* or a *Peanuts*. It is distressing to think that this particular kind of American humor may be dwindling away.

What is happening to the comics has happened to much of American popular art. Americans are a practical people. Practical people are exceptional problem-solvers and problem-finders. The more intense the problem, the more satisfying the solution. Problems, what Herbert Gold calls "happy problems," are the stuff the American public feeds upon, and the art or entertainment that depends upon mass appeal for its existence necessarily turns to problems as the best assurance of popularity. The formula can be noted in the way one slick-magazine editor states his requirements for fiction: "Short stories and novels which not only entertain but also give the reader a realistic picture of various phases of modern problems of life."

In some respects, this American preoccupation with problems is laudable. What better aim for a civilization than to address itself to life's problems and work dedicatedly for their solutions? But the popular arts make two important qualifications in their depiction of the troubles that beset mankind. First, all problems must have a solution; and second, all solutions must be reasonably simple and reasonably free from pain.

Unfortunately, life and art refuse to abide by these restrictions. Greek tragedy stands at the apogee of Western literature because it confronts man with a universe in which his problems are neither simple nor uniformly capable of solution. The speech that closes *Oedipus Rex* is a recurring one in Greek tragedy: "Count no mortal happy till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain." There is plenty of pain in soap opera, but little of the high seriousness of the tragic view. Unfortunately, the serious comic



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artists convey to a large segment of their readers the impression that real-life problems, problems that could conceivably be the basis for tragedy, are being faced and answered. Like the radio script writers who preceded them, these writers fail, *not* because they fail to write tragedy (no one demands that either soap manufacturers or newspaper syndicate directors sponsor classical tragedy), but because they pretend to write seriously about a world of their creation that has neither complexity nor depth and in which tragedy in the Greek sense would be impossible.

A noble concern for solving problems often conceals less exalted preoccupations. Under the aura of grappling with serious problems, the comic strips and the other popular arts are able to take advantage of middle-class morality, which is still dead set against a multitude of sins but eager to know the details. The reader of the comics, like the viewer of Biblical movies, can have piety and promiscuity in one package. If, as in *Mary Worth*, a heroine's profession makes it necessary for her to wear scanty costumes, she still can be shown reading Plato or the Bhagavad-Gita in the dressing-room. Or if, as in *On Stage*, the heroine ascribes to all the rules of small-town morality, as an actress she still can be frequently shown half-clothed while changing costumes. The cartoonist and his readers can share a sense of *worthwhileness* (no less important a quality than *togetherness*), while sex performs a kind of subliminal sell.

Nowhere is the temper of the serious comic more evident than in the brief feud between Al Capp and the team now doing *Mary Worth*, Allen Saunders and Ken Ernst. Capp's satire of *Mary Worth* in *Li'l Abner* was obvious and, at worst, heavy-handed. Mary Worth became Mary Worm, and the big-breasted, bromide-spouting meddler almost drove her creator to madness as his model and his mother-in-law. The illustration was comic: the over-blown woman, the frenzied cartoonist, the sparse situations through which he displayed them. The answering satire in *Mary Worth* was of quite another kind. The artist, not his creation, became the focus of attack; the drawings were superbly realistic; the lower lip on a recognizable Al Capp (called Hal Rapp in the sequence) was slightly distended to suggest sensuality and grossness. There was no



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humor in it; it was much like Pope flaying a second-rate hack, but without Pope's skill.

A family paper like the Des Moines *Tribune* (in the heart of comic-strip land) discontinued the sequence. The editor of the Buffalo *Evening News* advised Publishers Syndicate (distributor of *Mary Worth, Li'l Abner* being a United Feature property) that cartoonists could not use his newspaper's space to fight their private battles. The syndicate assured its clients that the sequence would end soon and that neither Saunders nor Capp would "do anything willfully harmful to the newspaper comics industry." Not long after, Al Capp assured the world that the feud was a hoax, that he and Saunders and Allen were the best of friends, that Hal Rapp would turn out to be a good fellow after all—in short, that neither he nor Mr. Saunders would do anything willfully harmful to the newspaper comics industry. The incident says a great deal about the nature of the comic strips, their status as industrial rather than artistic products, their extreme sensitivity to the public, and, speaking now of the serious strips, their commitment to worthwhileness, which comedy, particularly satire, does not properly respect.

In any struggle between types of comic strips, the slick, serious ones are likely to have the edge. The fundamental problem of keeping an imagination alive to comic possibilities is more demanding than transcribing, year after year, the heart throbs that sustain soap opera. More than that, the nature of the American mass audience, really a number of sensitive and articulate "mass minority" audiences, makes the satirist's work difficult. The popular arts seem condemned not only to creating what will please the public but to excluding everything offensive to any organized minority group that has a public relations voice. In every popular form, humorists work under a multitude of such restrictions. The consequence reflected in our serious comics is a turning away from the comic, a dereliction of the duty of making the reader laugh.

It is somewhat encouraging to note that a few strips aiming at comedy—sophisticated, slapstick or satiric—continue to succeed. Few are as coarse or as bold as early strips; most are a good deal more subtle. *Gordo, Peanuts, Barnaby* (for a time), *Pogo* and the like avoid some of the pressures from the mass minorities by writ-



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ing to a minority of their own. These strips appeal neither to the young children with whom the comics are popularly associated nor to the early teen-age mentalities for which most are obviously designed. The audience is perhaps the same one that makes it possible for the paper book trade and the record industry to merchandise such heady items as *A Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and Buxtehude's *Canzonettas*. The existence of such an audience may mean that an educated and sophisticated minority has grown to sizable proportions. That American culture as a whole is experiencing a corresponding enrichment may or may not follow. At any rate, new "comic" comic strips probably do not appeal to the majority of readers; new "soap opera" comic strips undoubtedly do.

The presence of the romantic-adventure strips seems to bear out the conclusions reached in recent mass media studies that the principal readers of the comics are the teen-agers. Such strips give them the images of physical beauty, material success and mental quickness that those seeking status prize, at the same time schooling them in only those adversities that do not persist, human relationships that can be easily understood and ideals to which they can easily aspire. Such strips offer one more avenue to immaturity of emotions, inadequacy of response to others outside a limited circle, a dreamlike perception of social mobility, a preservation of stereotypes (ranging from the one that cigarettes are evil to the one that all laborers and women over fifty have good hearts), and a general narrowing of experience and response that a sizable number of readers will doubtless carry into maturity. Comic strips are simpler to grasp than magazine stories, probably less arduous and time-consuming than radio serials. As a result, they are enjoyed by a greater number of people, and the conscious and unconscious fixing and supporting of modes of thought and action are considerable.

One set of investigators, Katherine Wolfe and Marjorie Fiske, writing on "Why They Read Comics," conclude that the normal child reads them as an ego-strengthening device, a source of amusement, an adaptation mechanism and a satisfaction of real developmental needs. Superman is a father-figure, an authority and power



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who settles the more difficult or ultimate issue. This seems reasonable enough. One might go only a little further and postulate that the evil in the comics comes not alone from the pattern of shock and horror that so arouses Dr. Frederic Wertham in *Seduction of the Innocent* but from the way they mirror life itself. In this respect, the dangerous comics are not only *Depraved Doctor Dimbo* and the like, which, after all, bear rather prominently *caveat emptor*, but the slickly drawn, expertly plotted, and convincingly realistic ones that carry, for the majority of their audience, no warning at all.

In glancing over the comics for a fifty-year span, one is struck by the general increase in facility of draftsmanship, the increased attention to detail, the more adept use of color, shading and line, and the more precise rendering of scene and expression characteristic of modern comic strips. Yet for all his skill, the modern cartoonist handles this talent to little purpose. The economics of mass art applies here as in other popular arts. If the slick strips are the ones the syndicates want and the circulation managers of newspapers buy, talent is going to follow in that direction. This, of course, is no new problem; but the comic strip's complete dependence upon mass circulation imposes a serious limitation to its development as a continually diverting popular entertainment, not to say, comic art.

The comics fail badly as art despite their pretension to seriousness—or perhaps because of it. They have about the same relationship to serious art that a tract like *Pierce Pennilesse* has to *Paradise Lost*. At worst, they have as much artistic value as Campbell Soup labels.

As objects of serious study, they rank considerably higher. They will offer much information to future historians as to how we lived, how we acted, and, in a large sense, how we (the thickening mass) responded at a period in history. They contain more material for interpretation than cave paintings, although probably not so much as the novel that is preserved for its "historic importance." As factors in shaping a nation's emotional and intellectual responses, they deserve much more study than they have yet received.



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# *In Easy Dark*

ERIC BARKER

I go by touching where I have to go,
Obedient to my own illumined hand.
I part the darkness, and I follow slow.

In easy dark I feel how light can grow.
The night is what my fingers understand.
I go by touching where I have to go.

What tells the wind and where the waters flow,
And plots direction that my eyes demand?
I part the darkness, and I follow slow.

A traveling world is what my hand must know,
A sail by water and a staff by land.
I go by touching where I have to go.

My hand is eyes' sure distance: to foreknow
The reef of shipwreck, the engulfing sand.
I part the darkness, and I follow slow.

Nor guttering wind nor wave can overthrow
This light that lights the rock on which I stand.
I go by touching where I have to go.
I part the darkness, and I follow slow.

✪ ERIC BARKER's poems have appeared in the *Yale Review, Harper's, Atlantic, Saturday Review, Poetry, Beloit Poetry Journal* and other magazines. He is the author of three books of verse. His second book, *Directions in the Sun,* was introduced by both John Cowper Powys and Robinson Jeffers and won the Borestone Mountain Poetry Award for the best book of poetry published in 1956.



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# The American Negro and the Issue of Segregation

JOSEPH MARGOLIS

IT IS BECOMING AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR STRATEGY for pro-segregationists to discuss our integration problem in the light of the racial difficulties of other peoples. India, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain are paraded before our eyes, and within our borders internationally oriented critics are thought to be effectively stalemated. The purpose, of course, is not to deny difficulties at home, but rather to insulate our national solutions. We are asked to remember, and not unreasonably, that the problems are our problems and must be solved to the satisfaction of our people, that versions of racial tension are almost ubiquitous and cannot be magically resolved, that effective adjustments do not fall into the simple categories of the right and the wrong, and are responsive to the peculiar historical traditions of a people.

This strategy, however, presents co-ordinate risks. Whatever decisions we make on the matter of integration are, for good or bad, open to international scrutiny; we cannot ignore this fact, particularly since it will affect the sympathetic reception of all our activities abroad. Normally, segregationists are interested in the success of our international commitments; we must suspect them, therefore, of seizing an opportunity when they invite us to ignore external and externally inspired criticism—however innocent they may actually prove to be. And it is surely not true that a non-Southern observer, or even a non-American observer, is necessarily biased or uninformed; we cannot afford, given the very delicacy of the integration problem, to disqualify competent advice and insight for geographical reasons.

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There is, as a matter of fact, a genuine benefit to be gained from comparing our own racial problem with those of other countries: namely, the discovery of its unique properties. I do not think that these have impressed themselves on the strategists of segregation, for although there may be comfort in the evidence of similar unrest abroad, there can be none in the solutions conceived.

The most significant feature of our problem is the complete absence on the part of the American Negro of any dreams of political separation, autonomy or semi-autonomy. He is actually politically integrated in the most realistic (though not the fullest) sense because there is not the slightest expectation that he will ever exhibit such hopes. It is this, precisely, that baffles alien critics, who quite naturally turn to their own politically ambitious minorities for clarification. The truth is not that the Negro is politically inert; on the contrary, the anxieties of leading American politicians prove their growing awareness of a growing political appetite among the Negroes. Some American Negroes may even exhibit pride at the emergence of the state of Ghana; on this score, however, most are significantly indifferent and uninformed (as is the rest of the country), and neither Negroes nor whites have seriously considered immigration in the present unrest.

Another distinction is the lack of a large, homogeneous culture that is originally the American Negro's. His reputed musical genius is complemented in no other field. Moreover, there are no restraints among whites upon exploiting, enjoying, imitating or contributing to this musical tradition. We speak of the special talents of individual Negroes and speculate on the moot ethnic sources of the music in which they excel. Wherever this seems promisingly linked to some actual Negro center (the same is true of economic distinction, as among the Sea Island Negroes, or of language, as the Gullah), the communities involved are invariably small, marginal, distinguished in one or two traits only, substantially different from other distinctive Negro groups, and now decidedly vestigial. The American Negro is typically unfamiliar with the geography, language and customs of his ancestral home, and exhibits absolutely no cultural nostalgia. He has no uniform economic, political, religious, artistic or literary tradition. The



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colorful patches that remain, including the synthetic phenomenon of the contented, singing darky, are merely recognizable fragments of a popular myth that belongs loosely to the undifferentiated population of the country. And even that myth, insofar as it is grounded in the slave experience of the Negro, points to his complete integration into the culture of the land. There is nothing to compare with the living communities of the Mormons, the Mennonites, the Hutterites and the Dukhobors, or with such dead communities as that of the Shakers. Perhaps his economic disadvantage has contributed to the Negro's lack of success in such ventures. He certainly has exhibited religious fervor, even idiosyncrasy. But had he been successful in founding his own cultural community, like these other peoples, he would still (unlike them) be contrasted with his own kind. It is inconceivable that all Negroes, learning as they have the different subtraditions of the American people, could be attracted to some single, invented doctrine that would set them apart with their own cultural identity. The truth is that the Negro has no dreams in this direction either.

A third feature of the American Negro's distinctive history is that his consciousness of being a people, based only on racial grounds and on grounds of status, begins with the very founding of the nation. He has no experience of invading or penetrating the land or of his own lands being invaded. He has no sense of allegiance even to the partisan alternatives in the great conflicts of the land, not even to those of the Civil War. He has no vision of a previous life that he might wish to restore. Inevitably, his views are variations on those of the white groups to which his life has been linked; and when he challenges these it is in the company of other white groups. The possibilities of racial solidarity may recommend convenient and economical tactics to Negro leaders, but the Negro has not conceived his policies to be anything but a plea for an adjustment in the opportunities conservatively afforded in the communities of the whites. He has not the slightest inclination to talk about special privileges for his people. In all of these respects, the American Negro must be contrasted with the American Indian. There is no reform significantly supported by Negroes that mentions any departure from the established customs of the



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whites. The attitude of Booker T. Washington, for instance, is completely characteristic of the race, even if today Negro leaders find his policies outmoded.

A fourth feature that may be mentioned is the American Negro's experience of both integration and segregation, of both Northern and Southern association, of both acceptance and discrimination by whites. In short, the Negro knows intimately both sides of every major issue that involves him as a race. He cannot, with a view to the nation whose own history provides him with an identity, conceive any racial protest as an innovation. On the contrary and in substantial contrast to the experience of minorities abroad, the American Negro has always voiced his protest as a legal protest. This is particularly clear today. His orientation, therefore, is fundamentally conservative, no matter how ardent his sense of outrage. The white South is seeking to consolidate the vision of a homogeneous subculture within the nation. As a race the Negro cannot accept his place in that vision because his experience includes more than that partially describable subculture. Hence it is that the precise factor on which the entire policy of the segregationist rests actually hardens the resistance of Negroes and disinclines them to seek a regional cultural identity. It is as a race that the Negro, drawing on the diverse subcultural experience he has had, hopes at least to make his legal status effective. And his reason for hope in this direction is precisely that the whites, also as a race, are divided against one another for reasons of different subcultural experience. It is important to note that the whites cannot conceive political allegiances along racial lines; the Negro can, but need not confine himself to these. The segregationist must retreat to whatever strength his particular region may have left. But the Negro, viewing his problems as a race, that is, on the very basis on which white privilege is ultimately defended, is relieved of the pressures that arise from the sense of total political, religious, social, economic, legal, artistic isolation within the enveloping continent of a homogeneous and aggressively domineering alien race. This is not to say that the Negro envisages an end to his problems as a race, but rather that he finds it possible to conceive these in comparative terms, in terms of the extension of his legal rights



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into the South and in terms of the improvement of his social relations with whites wherever he may settle. He exhibits no noticeably revolutionary zeal because, from his view, he faces no need for a revolution.

A fifth distinction may be found in the considerable artificiality of any division of whites and Negroes. This is not to say that a full-blooded Negro is not recognizably a Negro, or that a man of mixed blood will not frequently exhibit Negroid traits, but rather that both races know that there are no clear lines of division between them. The division is largely conventional, the label "Negro" being frequently a stigma imposed by the dominant "whites" even on persons known to have a substantial supply of "white" blood. The plantation system of the South itself has always been recognized, ironically enough, as the principal channel for the mixing of the races in the early history of the nation. Therefore, the differential treatment of the complete membership of the races cannot be seriously intended; it is largely an accident of time and place and accumulating family status that determines who, at any given moment, will be treated as white or Negro. The racial issue would not necessarily have been crucial in the context of minority struggles abroad. But because the American Negro has no distinguishing traits on which to fix other than his color, and because the policies of segregation rest exclusively on the criterion of color, the artificiality of the distinction has its important role to play in defining and solving racial grievances. The admission that there are extremely large, indeterminate, actively breeding groups among the peoples of the South, both "white" and "Negro," who are actually of hybrid racial stock would challenge in a fundamental way the feasibility as well as the sense of the segregationist program.

A sixth distinction is this: the aggrieved white communities that are pressing for continued segregation, as well as isolated individuals and small groups, have no historical or even a pretended grievance against the Negro. The ideology of the Deep South, for instance, speaks of historical grievances against the white North or against the federal government; even the Negro's participation in Reconstruction is largely attributed to another enemy. And as a matter of fact, the thesis of the South cannot help



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but emphasize the traditional harmony and well-being of the segregated, cofunctioning races. To admit that the Negro is the author of integrationist agitation is to deny the traditional harmony of the races. But to deny that harmony is to admit that the would-be benefits of segregation must be differently conceived from and take priority over that of mere racial harmony. At the very least, the Southern Negro population is infected with integrationist desires. It may well be true that integration will not lead to harmony and well-being; but it is equally true that segregation and the differential treatment of the races cannot now be said, from the view of the Negro, to lead to harmony and well-being either. Actually, the segregationist, insofar as he is antagonized by the Negro rather than, say, by Northern integrationists or the federal government, is antagonized by the prospect of having to alter an existing social arrangement that he regards as favorable and that entails a change specifically in the Negro's status.

A seventh distinction follows directly from these last remarks. The attempt to defend, on principle, the continuation of segregationist practices and the differential treatment of the Negro is inherently unstable. The entire South cannot possibly agree on the justification of these practices. To appeal to traditional practice as an adequate defense is to fail to acknowledge the mutability of tradition itself, the presence of different and incompletely compatible traditions in the South, the artificial enforcement of alleged traditions, and the inadequacy of assuming mere traditions to be self-justifying. To appeal to the law is to fail to admit earnest and conflicting views about what the law enjoins, radical legal disagreements within the South itself, and the apparently legal process by which decisions unfavorable to segregation have actually been reached. To appeal to "public opinion" or "self-determination" is to pit one public against another and to prefer *ad hoc* the favoring public; also, it is, inevitably, to discount the public opinion of the Negro. To appeal to alleged facts about the racial inferiority of the Negro is to rest one's case on doubtful findings that, in the open forum, are bound to be reversed; or to appeal to facts about the undesirable traits of the Negro, apart from color, is to generalize in a totally inadmissible way. To appeal to religious



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views is to fail to admit the ambiguity of these views, the impossibility of settling disputes based on such views, and the presence of earnest religious groups even in the South that read the same sources differently. To appeal to frank prejudice is to abdicate the very endeavor of defending practice. Add to this the absence of any motives of revenge, the lack of a genuine or imagined grievance against the Negro, the absence of distinctively radical or potentially dangerous practices and policies on the part of the Negro, the already extensive physical mixing of the races, the prestige of federal support for integration, defections against segregation in the South itself, and it becomes increasingly evident that to defend segregation and the differential treatment of the Negro as a race cannot be undertaken on any clear principle. If they could be defended at all, the adequate principle of defense would have to treat these practices as by-products of some other primary public program alleged to correct or forestall injustices in the South. In that case, racial discrimination would remain an independent question and its evils would still deserve to be weighed against these others. Or if one insisted that desegregation and the equal treatment of Negroes and whites ought to be introduced only slowly and with great care, the principle of racial discrimination itself would obviously have to be given up. The impossibility of fixing satisfactorily on some common and initially plausible principle contributes substantially, of course, to the frustration and bafflement of segregationist communities. And so, these communities exhibit an increasing solidarity on policy rather than on principle and a marked inclination to violence against the threatening figure of the Negro; their attempts to express their complaint as a principle, however, oblige them to disregard progressively the racial issues themselves.

These, then, are the principal factors affecting the present integration struggle. They jointly indicate the unlikelihood of a cogent defense of the practices of racial discrimination against the Negro, and they provide as well good and sufficient reasons for not treating the matter in the context of any superficially similar problems confronting other peoples.



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*reappraisals*

# The Existentialists and William James

JULIUS SEELYE BIXLER

Why have we allowed the existentialists to go so far with so little? Do they really have a message for us or just a few formulas with an air of profundity? "I can't tell you how much satisfaction I take in this ontological despair," remarked a student. The fact is that he could neither tell how much satisfaction he had nor why he had it at all nor what its meaning was for his life and thought. Despair, of course, will always be popular in some student circles, and if it can be labeled "ontological" its attractiveness is increased. But I think the real reason why the existentialists have won so much attention is that they have helped us to do something we feel is badly needed today, namely, to take philosophy out of the tower and put it to work in the market place and the arena. A generation that has been treated to such a steady diet of logical positivism is naturally on the lookout for stronger fare. The positivists have taught us much that was important to know. They have made an addition to the specialized fields that deserve our attention, and they have contributed to the sum total of knowledge. But, as has been said, although their finely ground axes serve to sharpen other axes, the giant redwoods of human concern do not fall before them. Man is not merely a logic-chopping animal, and philosophy must think of itself as more than an analysis of meanings if it is to do what it should.

The rise of the existentialists seems to show that we are at least dimly aware of this fact and that we have been on the lookout for something which offers an antidote for the recent exaggerated emphasis on semantics. But it is my belief that we should have looked in a different direction. Our glance might well have fallen on our own William James, whose positive philosophy is so appealing, although so unlike that of Peale. Both the existentialists and William James challenge philosophy to face up to the hazards and the creative opportunities of decisive action. But James, in my opinion, has done it so much more successfully that a theme song for our discussion might well be: "Everything they have said he has said better; he can write anything better than they!"

A comparison of James with the existentialists thus seems overdue. Yet it is obvious that one objection will be raised at the start. James, it will be said, belonged to the nineteenth century (he was born in 1842 and died in 1910), and no one who lived before the Time of Troubles can speak to our age. Yet are we so completely tied to the thought of our contemporaries? Or are we ready to surrender to the cultural relativism which argues that only those who share the same conditions can see the same truth? One frequently hears, for example, not only of the complete break between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but also of the chasm between Europe and America. Continental and American theologians will never be able to understand

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This essay was presented as the Annie Talbot Cole Lecture at Bowdoin College in February, 1958.



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each other, we are told, for one group was bombed while the other was not. The fact is, however, that Barth and Brunner, the influential theologians who first formulated the "crisis theology" so closely akin to existentialism, developed their most characteristic ideas as citizens of neutral Switzerland. And as for James, the optimist, did he not share the nineteenth century with the pessimistic Kierkegaard? It is true that Kierkegaard came earlier (he lived from 1813 to 1855), but the important point is that both wrote at a time when bomber planes had not been invented.

We are free to listen to James, it would appear, if he has anything to say. My own conviction is that he has a great deal to say and that it is very much in line with our needs of the moment. We are eager not only for a philosophy that will help us to decide and to act, but for one that can face down our creeping pessimism and offer us the kind of confidence we require as we confront the real hazards of our age. James gives us this; and if we take the time to refresh our acquaintance with him, we see that he asked questions similar to those of the existentialists and that he arrived at more satisfactory answers. It is interesting to note in passing that he stands by himself and that any attempt to classify him, even with the other pragmatists, obscures his contribution instead of clarifying it. As Professor Whitehead once remarked, James will never provide stereotyped definitions for future generations of students to learn. He believed in novelty and individualism, and he was himself an individual. The existentialists, on the other hand, even while differing from one another, seem to have enough in common to be called by one name and to be thought of as hanging together. I shall refer briefly to five of them: Kierkegaard, the brooding Danish genius whose ideas had such a spectacular revival about thirty years ago; Heidegger, still at Freiburg, who deserves the name of the Gertrude Stein of philosophy; Jaspers, former psychiatrist and philosopher at Heidelberg and now the intellectually aristocratic but humanly appealing refugee theorizer in Basel; Marcel, the Frenchman who came late to philosophy; and Sartre, the brilliant and courageous leader of the French resistance, whose plays and novels have been so widely read, and who in his earlier period, when under Heidegger's influence, expressed ideas so hard to match with his own heroic conduct.

What do James and the existentialists have in common? The immediate answer is that generally speaking both aim to be what philosophers would call "empirical." To be empirical means to take experience as it comes and to let it dominate one's theory. But most philosophers of recent times have limited the field to sense experience and have neglected as "unscientific" all that comes through the channels of feeling. Feeling, it is claimed, is much too vague and imprecise to offer a gateway to fact. James and the existentialists are alike, however, in rejecting this limitation. Both are broadly empirical in the sense of including emotion as a source of data. Both are willing to analyze man's hopes and fears, his confidence and despair, in the effort to find facts that can be used as the basis for ideas.

Both James and the existentialists are philosophical realists. A philosophical realist may be defined simply as one who distrusts the philosophical idealists. Idealists are wrong, says the realist, and even a bit tricky in laying so much stress on the mind's part in the making of reality. Reality is there, independent of mind. Both James and the existentialists believe that idealism neglects what is really real. We should deal with experience as it comes, they say, not with experience as the mind reconstructs it. Furthermore, as philosophers and observers of life we should be less interested in so-called "essences" that are conceptual constructions, abstracted from the living tissue of events, and more concerned with actual concrete existence as it is presented to us. Essences are "natures" or qualities, adjectival in character, universals that apply to many particulars. Existences, on the other hand, are tangible and individual. James finds these in the data offered by both senses and feeling. The existentialists are particularly concerned with the latter. They all agree that there are such nonsensuous but



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emotionally approachable facts as individuation, time, contingency and causal efficacy which offer food for thought.

In line with this passion for the concrete, both James and the existentialists do everything in their power to take philosophy out of the realm of the abstract, to personalize it, charge it with feeling and make it represent the poignant ups and downs of the experience of the living individual. They do this in different ways, it is true. James is too much of an experimental psychologist not to follow science as far as it goes or to fail to appeal to scientific observation where it is relevant. Yet he succeeds remarkably well in conveying to the reader the impression that whatever he touches is full of life and brimming over with import for personal decisions. For James even factual sense data pack what we might call an emotional wallop. But the existentialists as a group pay little attention to the data of science. Kierkegaard, of course, lived most of his life before science was born. Heidegger acts as if he simply were not concerned with science at all. Jaspers has been a clinical psychologist, but there is, so to speak, no smell of the laboratory in his books. In this sense James is broader than the others and ranges over a wider field. It is interesting to note in passing that for both James and Kierkegaard the horrible example of abstractionism is Hegel. For both writers, apparently in complete independence (James so far as I know was unacquainted with Kierkegaard), Hegel's attempt to make the real appear to be the rational is the supreme example of obliviousness to what actually goes on in personal life. James felt that Hegel failed to allow for novelty, differences, freedom, and the unfolding possibilities of experience. Kierkegaard put more stress on the agonies and frustrations that accompany our efforts to make up our minds. Although Heidegger has little to say of Hegel, he should be classed with the anti-Hegelians in his proneness to talk about what he calls "the authentic man" who does not go with the crowd, who is not the prey of the deterministic forces in his environment, but lives his own life with "authentic" and self-conscious awareness. The authentic person sees beyond the commonness of sense experience, projects himself into his own unique future, feels the strangeness of things as they are and, in particular, senses the fact that his life is pointed toward death. James would agree that this individualistic slant is good, but he would emphasize the rewarding rather than the lugubrious possibilities; and instead of alluding, with Heidegger and Jaspers, to "the authentic person," he would be much more apt to refer simply to "the real me."

Both these types of philosophy are practical in a sense that marks them off from much other philosophizing. It is true that "practical" is here a weasel word. It is true also that one must be especially careful about the way it is applied to James's pragmatism. James once wrote to his wife in ironic glee over a remark he was supposed to have made to the effect that "he wanted to bring a balm to human life." We shall never understand pragmatism if we approach it with the view that it aims simply at being everybody's little helper! But it must also be said that pragmatism in James's hands is more sensitive than many other philosophies to the relevance to the truth-seeking process of many practical human considerations. "Better to be than to define your being" is one of his most characteristic utterances. Philosophy should be practical not in any cheap and immediate sense, but rather in that it should always recognize that ideas were made for man, not man for ideas. The existentialists approach the matter somewhat differently. To them the plight of the soul in the face of the decisions it must make and the experiences it must undergo is so staggering that all else sinks into insignificance.

When we turn to freedom we reach a point where differences become as striking as similarities. James's conception of freedom and what it implies is central to his pragmatism, pluralism and radical empiricism. His whole psychology, for example, stresses the importance of the continuous process of selection that goes on in the stream of mental life. Perception, memory, reasoning, all require choice. Our knowl-



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edge takes its start from what we have chosen to pay attention to and remains within its limits. Reality itself, in the sense in which James uses the term, depends, for any significance it may have for us, on what we choose to interest ourselves in. The ongoing stream of events, also, independent of us as it is, must have its own flexibility and must break away from deterministic patterns if there is to be any novelty and variety in the world. And the moral life, of course, is impossible if freedom is ruled out. Even in religion, freedom is essential, for it is the genius of religion to "make a difference" in our lives, and we must choose to allow this difference to come if it is to come at all.

The existentialists approach the question of freedom through the extraordinary possibilities for good or ill resident in the act of decision, and particularly the basic decisions the soul makes in the presence of the great issues of life and death. Each of us, says Kierkegaard, must ask: Am I in any significant sense to be, or not to be? Am I to be myself, free from the pattern of the masses? How can I recognize my responsibilities to myself and my future? How can I be a self rather than simply a determinate object? Kierkegaard would have us realize that Hegel was wrong in attempting to bring everything under the folds of the all-encompassing synthetic blanket. Life presents us not with Both-And but with Either-Or. Under the blanket there is a naked sword.

For Heidegger genuine choice means to come to one's self and to be responsible for the whole of one's personality. It is only in decision, he says, that I become sure of myself as an integral whole and actually face the boundaries that limit my existence. Decision is thus really a new way of existing, bringing a new awareness of the possibilities existence holds. The moment of decision binds past, present and future together. It concentrates in itself the various parts of our nature and projects them into the future, which is colored by death. Genuine choice is that by which we come to ourselves and assume the responsibilities that are rightfully ours.

Jaspers makes freedom the touchstone of authenticity and uses it to distinguish authentic life as contrasted with mass life. Says Marcel: "To will is in some way to commit one's self, by which I mean to commit or bring into play one's own reality, to throw one's self into what one wills." For Sartre also, freedom and decisiveness constitute the essence of human experience. Sartre even goes so far as to make freedom the basis of all that is good. There are no fixed rules or norms. There is no "reason" to act as a guide. Man is only what he means to be or what he makes himself. He exists so far as he realizes himself in freedom, but he exists in isolation from moment to moment, determining himself by his own choice, but constantly having to determine himself again. Thus, whereas for Heidegger freedom expresses responsibility, for Sartre it expresses independence from responsibility and from everything, so far as the reader can see, except the choice of the moment.

This distinction between James's idea of freedom and that of the others is most important. The existentialists are right, of course, up to a point. Life is, indeed, a serious business, and its decisions, as the existentialists hold, are no laughing matter. We remember Shelley's warning that "Death has set its hand and seal on all we are and all we feel." On the other hand, it is certainly possible to look at freedom as an opportunity for creation, for realization of hopes, for fruitfulness and productivity. Which attitude is better or nearer the truth? Which is more arbitrary and less in accord with the facts? This is the decisive question in any comparison of the existentialists with William James. Yet what, after all, are the facts? For the existentialists the significant facts are somber. For James they are—or can be—hopeful. Is this difference a matter of sheer caprice? Or has James gotten hold of an idea that lacks the arbitrariness the thinking of the others shows?

As we search for an answer let us turn to the basic concepts used by the two parties, taking James's ideas first. We observe initially that the name "existentialist" could never appropriately be given to



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James because he fixes his gaze on what is to him the supremely important part of existence, namely, "life." We should remember that James had very unusual, even irregular training. His one earned degree was in medicine. He had traveled a great deal, and he was probably one of the most widely read men of his generation. His linguistic equipment included French, German and Italian. For a time he was an amateur artist. It is clear that his work as a medical scientist made him intolerant of the indecisiveness of philosophy, and his travel and reading made him impatient with its narrowness. As a result he modified in a drastic way the statement of the essential philosophical problem. Instead of focusing on the subject-object figure, he said, where we have found no significance, we should concentrate on the relation of the organism to its environment. This, he argued, is the larger, more suggestive and more fertile situation. Knowledge itself is a part of life and should be understood through its connection with and its service to life. Instead of speculating endlessly about how the knower in here can possibly know the object out there, we should see that knowledge is a fact and an actual event, that it occurs in the living process, in which the organism takes account of its environment and uses it for its purposes, and that the important question is how this process can be improved and perfected, not how it can occur in the first place.

Both as a scientist observing the way life acts and as a philosopher musing on the way it should act, James gave the thinking of his time the new twist, and the new awareness of mind as occupying a compartment within life, that was to result in the philosophy called pragmatism. I do not see the same evidences of this life consciousness in the other pragmatists. Peirce did not have it. Dewey, it is true, harks back to biology and to the flexibility Darwin brought to the categories; but although he makes much of purpose, his twin interests are society and the scientific method. The other pragmatists are chiefly concerned either with axioms as postulates or the social context of thinking, so that James—in this emphasis—stands alone. Indeed, if there is one figure to whom James appears to be nearer than others in his appeal to life and its possibilities, it would seem to be Nietzsche, who was truly a *Lebensphilosoph*; and it is interesting to note that Nietzsche is often classified with the existentialists as if he were one of them. But what Nietzsche saw in life was different from what James saw.

In appraising the existentialists, we should observe first of all that when they choose "existence" as a platform from which to make the metaphysical leap, they take a base so inclusive as to be practically meaningless. The concept of "life" is broad enough, so broad that, as we have seen, Nietzsche and James are led to differing conclusions about it. Yet life does have a recognizable character, and when philosophers begin to speculate on it we can, to some extent, check up on them. Is the same true of "existence"? Are there not so many kinds as to leave the term itself little meaning? If one is to philosophize about it, must one not give it a very arbitrary interpretation? To take a single example, when James uses the term "judgment of existence" as that which is to be contrasted with "judgment of value," he means the opposite of what the existentialists mean. And, as a matter of fact, his meaning is the ordinary one, accepted by most people when they use the term. But it is this ordinary, everyday, commonly accepted meaning that the existentialists reject. For them "existence" signifies life characterized by a very special set of values. In other words, their work is colored by arbitrariness from the start. "Existential," in the sense in which it is applied today to all these writers from Kierkegaard on, is restricted to personal, responsible experience. With Kierkegaard it is obviously limited to a still greater degree and actually refers to the orthodox Protestant Christian believer as he faces crises, agonizes over decisions and anticipates death.

Another basic conception of the existentialists is the idea of "being." Is this any more definite or is their treatment any less arbitrary? I do not think so. I stated earlier



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that the existentialists mean to be empiricists, and it is true that they claim to take experience as it comes. But is being an empirical datum? Does one see it or touch it or allow one's self to be hit by being as such? It seems rather to be a highly refined and abstract idea, reached only through a sophisticated process of analysis. The Greeks, in their speculative way, were concerned about being, contrasting it with non-being in the belief that they could thus argue about it more fruitfully. In his Freiburg lectures Heidegger used to wax ecstatic over Aristotle's forays into the land of being-as-such and his efforts to give it content. But Heidegger believes that the Greeks as a whole declined to follow Aristotle's lead and turned instead to an examination of the things that being contains. Then they confused the issue by equating the structure and qualities of particular things with the nature of being itself and made matters worse by identifying the over-all, ontological standpoint with the human, anthropological point of view. In the Middle Ages man emerged as a substance with fixed properties rather than the decisive, responsible self that Heidegger thinks he is. Finally, in modern times, the notion of being has been identified with a particular form of being. The materialists call it physical, the idealists mental. Man has become an isolated entity, establishing connection with his world only through a miraculous process of knowing, which it becomes the duty of philosophy to study and explain.

Thus what Heidegger really wants to do is to revive a speculative interest in being-as-such and a more practical concern for man as a creature who is both open to influences from being and capable himself of influencing it. He explains that man has various kinds of being, including being-in-the-world, being-with-others, being-unto-death and what he calls authentic being. There are also what he entitles constitutive phases of being, such as awareness, time, care and history. But I think we do not need to go much further to see that Heidegger uses the word "being" to cover just about what he wants it to cover and makes the idea mean whatever will fit best into his philosophizing. In fact, it is a question whether he is actually a philosopher of being at all or should not be called an imaginative producer of names for what he thinks is being. As a matter of record, he has shifted his position on the idealistic-realistic issue and now thinks being is different from what he once thought. In *Sein und Zeit*, his famous book, he adopted a position near that of German transcendentalism. Man is the center of the universe, and his thought is taken as a key to the universe's secrets. With the essay *Was ist Metaphysik?* there was a shift to realism and much more interest in man's mind as conditioned by outer reality. In fact, Heidegger in this essay and later began to cultivate a Greek attitude of natural piety toward the simplest objects of our physical environment and a desire to learn from them. But throughout it is the fantastic use of words to describe situations that depend on individual and unverifiable insights that strikes the reader. In his hands prepositions become verbs, conjunctions take on the work of substantives, new nouns are invented and lonely syllables stand out invested with a content of their own. Puns, furthermore, are put on a pedestal and new unauthenticated derivations achieve unwarranted emphasis. *Das Nichts nichtet*, "nothing nothings," is one of his darker if not profounder sayings, and it is matched by "the world worlds."

Sartre was for a time Heidegger's eager disciple, and one cannot help feeling that Heidegger's irresponsible use of words bore fruit in Sartre's earlier work as a philosophy of irresponsible action. Sartre as a person cannot be called irresponsible; we know that when he was a resistance leader he showed courage of the highest order. Why then should his philosophy, influenced by Heidegger, glorify irresponsibility unless it is that the looseness of Heidegger's moral thinking has begun to come out? Of "being" Sartre says, for example, that it is without reason, without necessity and without cause. Nor does man come off much better. Irresponsible action is in essence no different from action that is responsible. Life is absurd, consciousness an escape, man a failure, the idea of God a contradic-



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tion. As one commentator has remarked: "Sartre the critic may defend 'commitment'; Sartre the artist proclaims ambiguity, and indeed its enjoyment." Sartre himself affirms that man has no support or aid, there are no fixed rules or standards, and man each moment is compelled to invent man. "All these existents," he observes in a much-quoted passage from his book *Nausea*, "which bustled about . . . came from nowhere and were going nowhere. . . . Existence which is limited only by existence. I sank down on the bench stupefied, stunned by this profusion of beings without source."

It is easy to take isolated remarks from almost any author and make him sound ridiculous, and especially easy with writers so much given to excited exaggeration as are the existentialists. But the point to note here is that it is not merely the extreme statement but just as truly the main drift of their teaching that speaks to us of nausea rather than health. Let us look at their greatest difference from James and the point at which the contrast with him comes into sharpest relief.

The idea that above all others has left its curse on existentialism is the one that in German is called *Angst* and in English is translated "anxiety," "dread," "fear" or "alienation." As he makes abundantly clear when he talks about his own life, Kierkegaard was a man of morbid temperament, who saw the world through spectacles of a very deep blue. He was brilliant and perceptive in some matters; but he was antisocial, inclined to be easily hurt, to blame himself for imaginary sins, and to be blind to such real faults as his obvious exhibitionism and self-centeredness. Kierkegaard believed man is born a displaced person and remains so except as saved through supernatural intervention. He is subject to dread, not of any particular thing but of things in general. He is a lonely being, desperate, afraid and alienated. Alienated from what? The answer is not clear. He seems to be alienated a priori, necessarily, and in the nature of the case, alienated, that is, from anything to which he might want to become attached.

Not long ago a German psychiatrist wrote: "The neurotic has never been more strikingly described than in the self-torturing *Angst*-investigations to which Kierkegaard subjected himself." I believe the psychiatrist was right. The normal man, it seems to me, when he wants to philosophize does not start with nothingness or loneliness or alienation. The person who constantly feels so alienated is the one who has to be put away so that others can take up the responsibilities he refuses to recognize. The healthy point of view is that we are born into human relationships that may not be perfect yet have the possibility of love deeply resident in them. If we fail to see this, surely we cut ourselves off practically from any chance of developing the experiences of love that may be ours. The truth is also, as so many of these supposedly profound writers on the theme of human suffering do not seem to realize, that our worst pain comes not from our aloneness but from the fact that we are not alone. I mean that our most completely unbearable agony comes from our awareness of the suffering of those we love. Yet this suggests not that we are cut off from others, but rather that we are bound to them by the most unbreakable ties. Furthermore if, as these writers say, we are confronted by "nothing," then surely we face nothing to be afraid of. Nothing is not awful. Nothing is not "an abyss." Nothing is just—nothing, and the fact that the existentialists use such loaded words in describing it means that they are giving their case away. It might be said that they understand nothing and write about it.

Heidegger seems at first to correct this rather perverted trend in Kierkegaard's thought, for he talks freely about being-in-the-world and being-with-others, and he spends much time analyzing the various relationships into which man enters. But, alas, either the reading of the alienated Kierkegaard or else the lonely isolation of his Black Forest hide-out finally had its effect. Or just possibly the same cynical willingness to take things as they come, to ride with the Nazis when they were in the saddle and disavow them after the war, to intrigue for the rectorship of the university when it fell vacant, to cultivate Jewish



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friends before 1933 and neglect them afterward, made Heidegger feel that at the heart and core of things there is not only nothing to be afraid of but nothing to espouse and stick to and champion. For certainly the *Sorge* or "Care" about which he has so much to say, and which might have meant care for the best, eagerness to live up to the fullness of possibilities, and commitment to creative effort, quickly turns in his hands into a melancholy desire to do what one cannot do. Soon the world outside becomes itself if not an aching void at least a void that causes aches. In three respects, Heidegger says, man feels himself in the presence of nothingness: since he is placed here involuntarily he has no real control over what he is and does; his existence ends in death; the fact that he can recognize only a few of the many possibilities that confront him confirms his essential helplessness. We start by not being at home in the world, and we end in oblivion.

If this were all of Heidegger it would be impossible to explain his tremendous influence. But while the gloom and morbidness and nihilism are not all of Heidegger, Heidegger is all of this, and the people who quote him so glibly today are citing an authority whose work is of questionable inspirational value, to say the least. The truth is that the existentialists never have gotten over the fact that Kierkegaard saw a split right down the middle of the universe. Indeed, they have glorified this chasm and have been moved to ecstasy by the discovery that there is something basically wrong about the world, ourselves, our thoughts, feelings and acts. Kierkegaard for his part, believes that the harm is not irreparable. A divine force has injected itself into history with power to save us if we will accept its supernatural authority. But Heidegger sees no salvation. He is not an orthodox Christian. Thus he is infected by Kierkegaard's dread without having Kierkegaard's cure. Heidegger is not even a "humanist." Of his own thought he writes: "It has no result. It has no effect. It is sufficient to its own nature merely by virtue of being (*imdem es ist*)." Jaspers, although more humane in both life and thought, still seems to be obsessed by Kierkegaard's all-encompassing dread, although in his case it is dread of the loss of existential freedom through the steady increase of the influence of the masses.

Now philosophy, as James himself once said, is more a matter of passionate vision than of logic. If these men find it profitable to talk so endlessly about boredom, care, guilt, dread and despair, should we not, then, ascribe it to their own idiosyncratic taste, agreeing that thought like art has its areas where *de gustibus non disputandum est*? Or is this course perhaps to be distrusted just because it is so easy? Other writers have been as emphatic as the existentialists on the opposing side, and it is at least possible that their insight is more sure. Gnawings of conscience and repentance, says Spinoza, are "deleterious and evil passions. For it is manifest that we can always get along better by reason and love of truth than by worry of conscience and remorse." And James, quoting this passage in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, seems to have set himself to explain why, philosophically as well as practically, we are not only permitted but obligated to choose the more confident and cheerful alternative.

So where the existentialists concentrate on despair, James stresses faith and hope. Where they see an abyss, he sees a ladder. Where they succumb to nausea, he insists on examining the chances for health. But we note that he does this in a way which seems to him to be free from the taint of arbitrariness. For, as he says so often, the universe is not merely a vague M or passive material existing in and for itself, but M plus x, where x stands for the reaction of each of us to it. The universe must take us and our attitudes and purposes into account simply because it includes us as creative agents. At least some of its goodness, including its goodness for us, depends on what we do about it. Morally speaking, life is what we make it. Is it worth living? This depends not merely on the liver in your body, which may yield to cirrhosis, but on you the personal liver, the liver which may yield to melancholy but need not. How then, James asks, can we exclude from cog-



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nition of a truth the faith that is involved in the truth's creation? And James's whole point is, of course, that the truth about life and death and their significance is one in the creation of which such faith is involved.

All initial postulates have a touch of the arbitrary about them. But James has taken a position less arbitrary than most because it is both definite and inclusive. Life is a phenomenon we know inside and out as humanists and scientists, so to speak, and its possibilities are verifiable. It is true that the term has many meanings and that Nietzsche, for example, found other interpretations more significant. But does not James's view take account of more facts? The will to live expresses itself not only in the will to power but also in the will to love. It is the nature of life, said Georg Simmel, to become more than life, and he had in mind its capacity to develop a type of thought that turns its back on life as such and dominates even life's passion for survival. James must, I think, have had this in mind as he moved on from his psychology of selection to his philosophy of salvation, for his later writings show that the organism-environment relation is a two-way street. The organism uses its environment, it is true, but it also depends on its environment; and when the organism is a reflective human being, it finds itself depending on a cloud of spiritual witnesses, including reasonable ideas and ideals, from which healing influences come. In other words, it is the fullness of life that James offers us, and this breadth and inclusiveness are what give his philosophy its adequacy and power.

Does not James's choice of "life" as a springboard for his philosophy point to the special positive and constructive force that is at work in verification itself as a forward-moving process within the advancing currents of experience? When James identified his pragmatic view of truth so closely with the things that may or may not happen to an idea as it gets itself verified, it seems as though he must have felt instinctively the onward marching, progressive and creative impulsions that verification brings into play when given the right start. As he himself says, if we begin with the thought of death, it comes sooner than it might. Call your world meaningless and it loses such meaning as it has. Believe that nobody loves you and love dries up. Choose despair and all becomes desperate. But believe in hope and you put yourself in line with the forces that favor hope. Act courageously and courageous elements in the situation come to your aid. Accept the responsibilities of a fighting chance, and not only morally but intellectually you will discover allies. We all know that a philosopher is a blind man in a dark room, looking for a black cat that is not there. But a theologian is a blind man in a dark room, looking for a black cat that is not there—and he finds it! As James so insistently shows, advance to the truth requires not complete suspension of judgment but an active forcing of the issue where the dynamic quality in belief elicits a similar dynamism in the situation it confronts—a dynamism that is not merely a part of life but also characteristic of mental life as it presses toward its intellectual goal.

It is illuminating to compare the different ways in which James and Heidegger approach the problem of how we should respond to the daily and hourly challenges with which experience confronts us. Both philosophers make the idea of "commitment" central. But Heidegger with his idea of *Geworfenheit* (which literally means "thrown-ness" or "placedness") makes much of the fact that we have been put here without our consent, looking backward to nothingness and forward to death. James, on the other hand, takes our being placed here as a challenge. What can we do about it? What can we make of it? How can we respond effectively? he asks. His answer, in essence, is that we can play the game with courage and faith. Actually this seems to be the rule that each of us follows most of the livelong day. Tasks are set us that we did not choose. Effort must be put into work we would not have elected. Our own limited purposes are placed in a larger framework that does not represent anything we have willed ourselves. How should we treat this predicament? Take it as a basis, say the existentialists, for self-pity. Accept it rather,



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says James, as literally a God-given chance to produce some Godlike results. And be glad that without effort on your part you are put in a position in which your own effort can count.

One may hold that this is all a matter of temperament and that obviously James was born with rose-colored glasses. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of the many eloquent passages in which he explains just how horrible life actually is, I will cite only one from the *Varieties*:

> There is no doubt that healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth.
>
> The normal process of life contains moments as bad as any of those which insane melancholy is filled with, moments in which radical evil gets its innings and takes its solid turn. The lunatic's visions of horror are all drawn from the material of daily fact. Our civilization is founded on the shambles, and every individual existence goes out in a lonely spasm of helpless agony. If you protest, my friend, wait till you arrive there yourself!

All this and much more can be found in the *Varieties*. As a matter of fact there is one passage full of helplessness and defeat quoted by James as from a "French correspondent" that we now know he himself wrote as a description of his own despair. His optimism, in other words, can never be called merely a matter of temperament, and his confidence, so far from being narrow and unseeing, is really based on pessimism. In his own words, it is a "higher synthesis into which healthy-mindedness and morbidness both enter and combine." It is the optimism that the sensitive spirit sees is necessary if life's challenge is to be met and its work done. Arbitrary it may be in the sense in which any choice of an initial postulate is arbitrary; yet, as James puts it, dupery for dupery, is it not better to trust the stimulating dupery of hope rather than the paralyzing dupery of fear? The question of the worth of life, we are told, is one that the healthy have no wish to discuss but the unhealthy no right to decide. In other words, the questions treated by the existentialists and James involve insights that call into play powers of perception having their origin in the living currents of impulse, desire and purposeful hope that animate all our experience, and are rightly decided in the light of what these forward-looking drives reveal. It is true that we cannot philosophize without philosophizing about death, but it is equally true that we cannot philosophize adequately except as we are prompted by life.

What then is our conclusion? First, that both the existentialists and James have a message especially pertinent for our age, dominated as we are today by logical positivism. With both we must resolutely set our faces against any trend that identifies philosophy exclusively with the analysis of words and cuts it off from the wider area of our loves, our fears and our hopes.

Second, both are important as much in their suggestiveness as in their dialectical appeal. When we deal with the issues of life and death, words can never be expected to communicate the full truth in its richness. This is a realm for both imaginativeness and faith. Here the existentialists and James stimulate us to creative ideas of our own.

But third, a comparison of the two sets in sharp relief the difference between a pessimistic approach and one in which pessimism is given its due, yet optimism retains the upper hand. It is a difference that deserves our special attention today, for there seems to be a mounting social awareness of danger that could very well help to bring upon us that which we fear. In such a pass, how clear is the light that streams from James's life and thought and influence! If we allow our beliefs to be dominated by our fears, when by the exercise of a little more courage they could be buoyed up by our hopes, and if thus we fall into the abyss before which we tremble, how unhappy will be our lot and how reprehensible morally we shall appear at the Day of Judgment! There are many occasions in history when stubborn belief prompted the kind of courageous action needed for its own



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verification. One prophetic utterance from the Old Testament that James himself quotes with enthusiastic approval may appropriately be referred to in conclusion. The sixth century B.C. found the ancient Hebrews in utter despair. Their land had been ravaged, their people exiled, and perhaps most important of all, the temple, symbol of the presence of the eternal God who was their refuge, lay in ruins. At this crisis, Ezekiel in Babylon saw approaching from the north a cloud of flame and smoke that may well have seemed to him to assume mushroom form, and it filled him with such terror that he fell upon his face. But the Spirit that was in the chariot in the cloud refused to accept this groveling response. It reached down and raised him up, as if to insist that truth will be revealed only to him who has the courage to face it. And it was not until he was ready to act that he heard the immortal words: "Son of Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

* * *

Coming . . .

A Reappraisal Of

Thornton Wilder

*by Edmund Fuller*



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THE EDITORS

*announce*

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# *If You Don't Mind My Saying So . . . . . .*

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

When the controversial Dr. Teller was asked what we might expect to find on the moon, if ever we did manage to get there, he is said to have replied: "Russians." This, I think, could well stand as the best symbol for the collapse of that American self-confidence (or arrogance, as foreigners call it) that has not wavered for at least a century. On what other occasion did we ever doubt that we could get anywhere at all "firstest with the mostest"? And the worst of it is—at least as many see it—that we are being beaten at our own game. The rest of the world now has a new hero and a new enemy. We are no longer the outstanding example of what it fears, despises, admires and imitates.

Less than a decade ago we were still saying that dictatorships could not be as efficient as free enterprise. Now we are convinced that they can. On the basis of the evidence so far, it looks as though what really is incompatible with totalitarianism is not technology but art, literature, ethics, dignity and, in short, everything that goes under the name of Humanism—and we have never been inclined to give that anything better than second place in our scale of values.

I am still patriotic enough to hope that if anybody gets to the moon and beyond, it will be one of our boys. But I am also a member of that minority which would prefer to have nobody at all get there, although I have to admit that my belief that nobody will "in the foreseeable future" is wavering. When Von Braun's *The Mars Project* was published in 1952, even I could understand enough of it to conclude that the unsolved problems were so imposing that it would take the Russians (to say nothing of the second-rate Americans) a long time to solve them. Some pretty formidable ones obviously remain. But "we are making rapid Progress"—as those who think that way like to put it.

What puzzles me most are the mental processes of that majority—most of whom are neither scientists nor devotees of science fiction—which believes that if we get to Mars we really would have got somewhere. One educated and well-read man recently told me that "space travel" would constitute a triumph for man greater than any other in his long history. But he was unable to explain why in any terms I could understand. And those who fall back upon "the increased knowledge of the universe" that space travel would bring are no more convincing. For one thing, few who profess to thirst for it have taken the trouble to absorb much of all that physics, biology and the other earth-sciences already know. Moreover (and as Thoreau stole a metaphor from Sir Thomas Browne to point out) there are more white spaces on the map of our own selves than there are on that of Africa—or Mars. Is it really worth while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar? "Is Dr. Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so anxious to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is?"

From the air, portions of northern Arizona, especially in the neighborhood of Meteor Crater, look very much like the moon as it appears in the photographs taken through the big telescopes and in the remarkable imaginative re-creations of Chesley Bonestell. Unlike some people, I find an awful beauty in just that country. But you do not have to fly as far as the moon to see it, and I suppose that those who are anxious to go there are not primarily interested in looking at lunar scen-



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ery. So far as the climate is concerned, it is universally admitted to be abominable not only on our nearby satellite but on all the other planets as well.

Thinking of what man has done to the one earth to which he has so far been confined, Havelock Ellis once wrote that "the sun, moon and stars would have disappeared long ago had they been within reach of predatory human hands." Could it be only such predatory hands that are reaching out? Since our earth still has large resources not yet exploited out of existence, and even a number of beautiful natural areas not yet "developed" and "improved," I feel compelled to reject this simple explanation and to conclude that the widespread desire to take off for Mars is primarily a neurotic symptom of mankind's unacknowledged conviction that he has made a mess of things at home; or, in other words, that space travel represents the most grandiose escape mechanism yet elaborated by the ingenious but self-defeating human mind.

It does no good to tell an ordinary, small-scale neurotic that "getting away" is not going to help because he will have himself for company no matter to what far country he travels and because all his troubles will follow him. Probably, therefore, it will not help to tell the whole human race that it had much better try to learn how to live on its own planet than run away to another. And it is so much less likely to help because we are already so firmly convinced that if power, speed and wealth have not so far made us contented or wise, it is only because we have not yet had enough of any of them. The philosopher in *Rasselas* refused to demonstrate the flying machine he had invented because he did not believe that men should be able to fly until they had become virtuous and wise. We, on the contrary, believe that flying and similar antics will, sooner or later, make us both.

Recently, to be sure, I have heard an increasing number of people volunteer the opinion that "technology is not enough" and that perhaps we should devote more attention to some other things. But when I have asked them what sort of other things, I have usually got, in one way or another, the answer that one of them gave: "Why, 'the behavioral sciences' especially." There was not a word about reason or virtue or wisdom, and no assumption that any one of these things is effective, capable of cultivation or, for that matter, anything more than an empty word. There was only the suggestion that we ought to know better how people could be managed and cajoled and manipulated. But if this is the only alternative to technology, so far as I am concerned we might just as well all take off for Jupiter without caring much whether we ever get back or not.

Having so signally failed to "control the machines" of either production or destruction that the one threatens to choke us to death with unconsumed goods and the other to blow us off the face of the earth, we now believe that we might have more success with the simpler machine that used to be called "a human being." But it is my opinion that if we are to be saved at all it will be by reason and reasonableness; by some sort of wisdom, virtue and prudence, and not by the mere "behavior patterns" that are as related to them as a robot is related to a man or a calculating machine to a real brain. Who, when we have mastered the behavioral sciences, will condition the conditioners and manipulate the manipulators? Who will ask the calculating machines the questions they may sometimes answer but can never formulate?

It is now almost a generation ago that the late Bernard De Voto let go with his blast against the "literary mind," which he accused of dealing exclusively in bad guesses and baseless prejudgments without bothering in the least about the facts. To attempt a rehabilitation would be to undertake a task more formidable than I care to assume, but I will fling a *tu quoque* at those who put more faith in those accounts of human nature that pretend (as the opinions expressed by the cultivators of the literary mind do not) to be demonstrated facts and proved truths rather than merely convictions offered to those who find them believable. Bad logic and pretended facts are more dangerous than imagination and



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opinion. Even the simple-minded do not believe a thing just because a poet says so. But they seldom doubt what they are told that "science proves."

At the risk of being accused—as I have been before now—of harping upon one of my own obsessions, I am going to give a recent specimen of what I mean by a pretended fact and an egregious example of a "science proves" when it actually does nothing of the sort.

A recent study called *Social Class and Mental Illness* undertook to examine the incidence of psychoses in five groups representing as many different economic levels. It offers figures to show that though Class One (the most prosperous) includes 3 per cent of the population and only 1 per cent of the psychotic patients, Class Five includes 18 per cent of the population and 38 per cent of the psychotics. What conclusion, if any, the author draws I do not know, but a college professor reviewing the book in one of the well-known weeklies comes out with a ringing one: "Seldom, perhaps, has a more devastating revelation of the inequities and the human costs of our class system been made."

Now it may be that most or even all psychoses are economically determined. But is it even necessary to point out that as logical proof the figures cited are nonsense? Sociologists are fond of telling us that ours is a society "characterized by a high degree of social mobility." Many people are not born into the class where we find them, and the immediate ancestors of many born into a given class were themselves born into another. How on earth does the author of the study, or his reviewer, know how many of their psychotics became such as a result of their poverty and how many were poor because of one or another kind of mental inferiority? Many poets, novelists and playwrights have assumed much that the reviewer assumes. A few others have, in a general way, assumed the opposite—namely, that where a man finds himself in the social scale depends more upon what he is than upon the pressures of his society. But the question here is not which assumption is most nearly correct. It is simply whether the so-called scientist is not actually only expressing an opinion while he pretends to be demonstrating a truth and, at that moment at least, functioning as a literary mind rather than a scientific mind—the only difference between him and the poet being that he, apparently, does not know what he is doing.

Or take an even more obvious case. Once —I forget where—I saw a simple "proof" that crime is even more obviously than psychoses the direct result of poverty. This proof consisted of two maps of a large city, one of which was shaded to show the poorest areas, and the other, the areas having the highest incidence of crime. It will surprise no one to be told that the two most deeply shaded areas approximately coincided. Neither, I imagine, will many be inclined to deny that (as many literary minds as well as many social scientists have assumed) poverty is at least one of the causative factors of crime. But the maps do not "prove" even this minimum conclusion, because so far as the logic of demonstration is concerned we might just as well conclude that what they really prove is that the kind of mental and moral inferiority that keeps people poor also leads them to commit unlawful acts so clumsily that they get caught. Crime doesn't pay—or at least the kind that winds up in a police court doesn't. Neither the maps nor the reviewer's unjustified Q.E.D. really prove anything. But to those who think they do the results are a gratifying confirmation of their inclusive belief that neither sanity nor virtue is an effective force in human life, which is, on the contrary, everywhere governed by external determinants.

An American commentator is said to have once wondered how it happened that the largest cities seemed usually to have had the good luck to be founded near harbors. I like even better an illustration of the goodness of God said to be given by a medieval Mohammedan commentator: "Most of the rain falls on the fertile regions where it will do some good, seldom on deserts where it would be wasted." Any-



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way, both the gentlemen responsible for these observations were exemplifying the literary mind. But despite pretensions to the contrary, so were the makers of the maps and the reviewer of *Social Class and Mental Illness.*

Of course Mr. De Voto was right too. The literary mind is capable on occasion of all the nonsense he blamed on it. No doubt there is as much folly as wisdom enshrined in the world's libraries; but that is not the fact we are most likely to forget today, and if I growl often at the technologists and the behavioral scientists it is because they are so obviously top dogs. Everybody listens to them, and they run things. The question is whether their wisdom is as obviously dependable as we commonly assume it to be, and, also, just how much worth knowing we have really learned from them.

That we have learned a good deal and that some of it has been useful, I have never doubted. But I do doubt that their wisdom has superseded all other kinds, and I do believe that we have lost much by acting as though it had. I still think that there is more to be learned from Shakespeare than from all psychology and sociology put together; that if the choice had to be made, mankind could better afford to be ignorant of everything the science of man has discovered than of what it has learned from the poets. Never to have read *Hamlet* would be to have deprived oneself of far more than never to have known Freud.

No man can be explained or understood except by someone more intelligent, perceptive and sensitive than he is. That means that the more admirable and excellently human any individual is, the less likely is he to be understood by any given professional understander and explainer. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the latter are, as a class, always in any respect superior to their subjects. On college campuses and elsewhere I have met quite a few "counselors" of one sort or another. No doubt they have been of great help to the dullest, but one would need to be pretty dull and unimaginative to profit much from some of them.

The great advantage of the humanist is that he addresses his fellow man *as* a fellow man, not as a mere subject or patient. Of the various ways of making this distinction I like best the one associated with the name of Martin Buber—the distinction I mean between the "I-Thou" and the "I-It" relationship. To treat a fellow man as an "It" is to make man himself a mere "Thing," and the great danger of the psychological-sociological approach is that it is constantly tempted to do just that.

What it finally comes down to, some citizens of the Soviet Union now know—as witness a quotation by Boris Pasternak that I lift from a review of his new novel. Speaking of those who talk so much about "reshaping life," he says: "They look upon it as a lump of material that needs to be processed by them. . . . But life is never a material, a substance to mould. . . . Life is a principle of self-renewal, infinitely beyond your or my obtuse theories." Quite a mouthful to come from Pavlov's native land!



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# . . . . . *The Revolving Bookstand* . . . . . .

## The Comic Tradition

HENRY CARLISLE

Once, the incomparable Mencken, solicitously prescribing artistic hobbies in place of golf or Kiwanis for bored and dissatisfied businessmen, suggested among other therapy that Babbitt ". . . take a stiff drink and try *vers libre*. Or, if his tastes run to more sober things, let him collect early American humor. . . ." As anyone who has tried it lately will testify, the archaeology of early American humor is a pastime in which real finds are rare and impediments are many, always seeming to inhibit the researcher from sharing open laughter with his great-grandfather. One finds that there is little native vintage humor preserved in books, and even less in books currently in print or easily available. Some of it is political or occasional satire, which turned to dust along with the issues and persons it attacked; and some is, for other reasons, simply not very funny in its excavated state. There are maddening obstacles in the outmoded forms and fads, such as the Yankee Doodle doggerel of the Revolutionary period and the notorious fashion for phonetic spelling, which was a blight on the prime Civil War crop of humor, including the otherwise memorable satires of Petroleum V. Nasby and Orpheus C. Kerr. As further discouragement to fanciers of period laughter, one must add the currently depressed state of humor as it reaches us through the popular media. Television, for example, invites us to wonder whether the highest traditions of American humor have been worth it all. Contrary to all true comic traditions, the denatured humor of television is calculated to take the audience's mind *off* its troubles, anesthetize its critical intelligence with stultifying merriment, and thus decrease its sales resistance. Medicine show entertainment in America has always been of this caliber, although prior to the electronic age the audience was limited to a handful of people at a time, and usually not the best element. Far worse, since few seriously expected a contribution from television toward the enrichment of native humor, is the fact that newspapers, which once opened their pages to the best humorists in the land, cannot at present boast a single column of humor with a genuine satirical bite (with the exception of occasional editorials in papers of limited circulation, such as the weekly *Territorial Enterprise*, published in Virginia City, Nevada). Yet, we live in a time when clear and present targets of satire abound. It is easy to imagine what serene devastation Mr. Dooley would have brought down on Mr. Dulles' head, and how Mencken in his heyday would have razed Norman Vincent Peale.

This is the dark side of the picture. The fact is that much of what has amused Americans in the past *is* still entertaining and does give us a feeling that national comic literature has, if not a tradition, at least a certain continuity. Moreover, American comedy thrives today; but it thrives best when farthest from the greater public media —for example, in barrooms, night clubs and books. One of the things to be learned from the history of American humor is that this is a very odd state of affairs.

Over the years the British have more often than not been reliable weathervanes of the state of American comedy. One Victorian commentator was a Reverend Haweis, who published an *American Humorists*

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in 1882 in London. In quaint, nervous dithyrambs, Haweis fussed over Washington Irving, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, Artemus Ward, Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and introduced brief passages of their works in which he found matter for amusement. His general introduction is of interest, especially his thumbnail definition of American wit: "American wit has three main roots. These roots *seem part and parcel of the national character* and are inseparably connected with the early history of our American cousins." The three roots were "the shock between business and Piety"; "the forcible and national contrast forever present to the American mind between the Yankee and the poor Red Man whom he has supplanted"; and "the contrast between the vastness of American nature and the smallness of man, especially European man, [which is] a never-failing source of amusement to Yankee humorists." Setting aside the provocative "three main roots," one finds it notable that the Reverend sketched out what has become a principal axiom of most modern scholarship dealing with American humor: that its unique qualities derive not from an adaptation of the English or Continental comic inheritance (although this adaptation occurred) but from discoveries in the successive stereotypes of national character of totally fresh sources of comedy. Throughout the eighteenth century, a cocky and critical humor developed, reaching its highest pitch during the Revolution; but until the nineteenth century most literary expression of it was patterned closely after Samuel Butler, Dryden, Swift, Addison or lesser transatlantic models. Benjamin Franklin wrote some superheated political satire that challenged the English examples of the form on their home ground; but Franklin was also one of the first American writers to find inspiration in native character.

Constance Rourke, in her excellent and durable book *American Humor,* traced nineteenth-century humor not to Franklin, however, and certainly not to the colonial satirist Nathanael Ward, sometimes called the first American satirist, but to its sources in later folk stereotypes of the Yankee peddler, the backwoodsman, the rip-roaring frontiersman, as well as to the play traditions of minstrels and strollers. Perhaps the first fully evolved comic character based on the Yankee was Jack Downing, the creation of Seba Smith. The Downing papers were widely read and imitated throughout the country; they represented Jacksonian democracy through the canny and imperturbable eyes of a Yankee, whose letters about the Washington scene to kin and friends were in the idiom of the Down East village of Downingville. This type of humorous satire, which depends upon the creation of a comic character of an unmistakable American stamp, sometimes indistinguishable from the humorist himself, who is licensed to comment freely on the state of national affairs in humorous contrast with the state of village, rural or ward affairs, is a standard form of nineteenth-century comedy. Jack Downing, Petroleum V. Nasby, Orpheus C. Kerr, Mr. Dooley: their creators could entertain readers with uninhibited criticism of national absurdities and at the same time show a comic reflection of grass-roots character.

The image of the western frontiersman, legends of Mike Fink and Davy Crockett, released another flood of humor, which portrayed the American male as a nonpareil, gigantic and invincible (leaving "European man," as the Reverend Haweis bravely acknowledged, either beneath contempt or a figure of fun). "With his triumphs fresh and his mind noticeably free," wrote Constance Rourke, "by 1815 the American seemed to regard himself as a work of art. . . ." Bigness, strength, extravagance, extraordinary prowess and a hard core of Yankee wit are the usual attributes of this paragon; the laughter derived from him is more that of exultation than of satire, although there is some of each. The crowning achievements in the tradition of frontier humor were accomplished by Twain, in whose work American comedy, derived from unsullied notions of national character, found its finest expression. In Twain's later work, and especially in *The Connecticut Yankee,* is symbolized the with-



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ering away of the folk-created stereotypes of national character and their failure to answer for the realities of American experience.

The conflict between the American sense of humor and the American sense of disillusion and metaphysical dismay can be detected in many writers before Twain. It is an undercurrent in our comedy that often appears at the surface. Irving, failing in his search for a link between America and his romantic ideal of nobility and antiquity, turned the American past to ridicule in *A History of New York*. Hawthorne, in his Bunyanesque satire "The Celestial Railroad," struck out with despondent humor at America's soullessness, optimism and materialism, revealing the abyss that stretched between "business and Piety." Such personal visions of America's failure to match either its own ideals of itself, formed from the folk notions of American character, or any other known human ideals were constructed by relatively closeted writers who viewed the nineteenth-century American scene with some protective detachment. The final disenchantment of Twain, who had grown up in the center of the carnival and who had entertained readers with comedy that was deeply rooted in American character, is of another order. Thereafter, the American is no longer a work of art. His character is in doubt.

In a recently published critical anthology of American humor in literature, *The Comic Tradition in America* (Doubleday Anchor Books, $5) the editor, Kenneth S. Lynn of Harvard, offers a broad sampling of allegedly humorous literature by American authors, some "classical," some regionalists. His main criterion is stated thus: "I have tried first of all to follow the simple principle that a story which didn't amuse me didn't get in. . . . The laughter of the editor has been the sine qua non. . . ." With the exception of Benjamin Franklin, the selections are all from the nineteenth century. He finds that "No pre-Revolutionary writer—except Franklin—had fully realized what sort of comic concoction might be brewed out of the roots of folk humor. . . ." Among the other authors included are some that are generally shelved under "Belles lettres, American"—Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, and (if the shelving classifications have been revised during the past quarter of the century) Mark Twain. Then, there are other authors whose works are placed under "Americana," "Folklore," "Juveniles" or perhaps "Miscellaneous," if they are to be found at all—A. B. Longstreet, Seba Smith, Johnson J. Hopper, T. B. Thorpe, George W. Harris, Richard Malcolm Johnston and Joel Chandler Harris. As a rule these writers, with their high-spirited caricature and burlesque of native types, are more likely to amuse us than are the juggernauts of American letters, whose attempts to satirize American character often collapse of their own weight. Yet while there are occasional chuckles in *Sut Lovingood*, by George W. Harris, they are few and far between; today the strain of sadism is more striking than the humor. Harris' purpose was to entertain, but most of *Sut Lovingood* is not much funnier for modern readers than "The Celestial Railroad," which probably has never started a single smile. One characteristic of nineteenth-century comic literature in this country seems to be a strong polarity of entertainment and criticism, which tended to defeat the purposes of both the entertainers and the critics.

There is no disputing tastes in humor, but I find it hard to believe that Professor Lynn found laughter in all or even in a majority of the selections in *The Comic Tradition in America*. Furthermore, there are omissions (quite apart from the general omission of the twentieth century) that lessen the value of the collection as a representation of writing that has, at least, yielded laughter in the past. One of these omissions is Petroleum V. Nasby, whom Professor Lynn states he finds dull. Here he is clearly on the side of the angels: almost every encyclopedia, biographical dictionary and literary history in the past three generations has dismissed or ignored Nasby. The usual mention of him includes the facts that he was born David Ross



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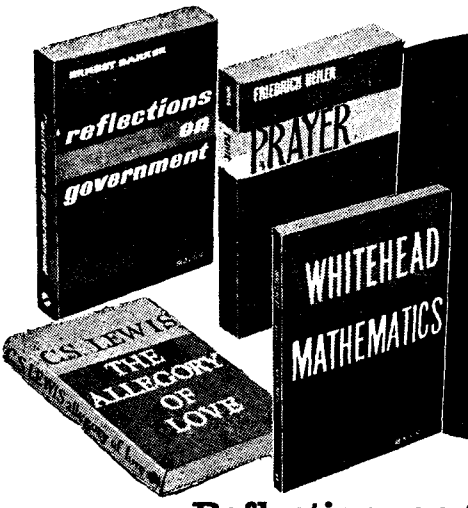


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Locke in 1833; that he eventually became the editor of the *Toledo Blade*; that during the 1860's he was immensely popular, almost as popular as Twain for a time; that his work was prized by Lincoln; and perhaps that *The Nasby Letters* was the most effective single work of pro-Union literary propaganda written during the Civil War. But, with a caution about the phonetic spelling fad, Nasby is usually dismissed as a once-popular entertainer with no serious claim on posterity. His biographer, Cyril Clemens, further reduced Nasby's chances of survival by offering that *The Nasby Letters* constitutes "the most humorous series of satires that were ever written," and elsewhere, more temperately, that "there has hardly been any finer satire since the days of Swift." Having been both damned and excessively praised, *The Nasby Letters* is not to be found in any current edition.

The character Locke created was a half-literate Northern Democrat, whose nature was ruled by a harmony of abysmal ignorance, depravity and a democratic confidence in his lofty estate. Nasby's wants were simple: plenty of whisky, easy money and a postmastership with no work attached. When Petroleum commented on the failings of the Union cause, the righteousness of the Confederacy, the supremacy of the white race over the black, further argument of these matters on a serious level was hampered. Nasby seemed to invest everything he defended with ridicule and everything he attacked with nobility. In spite of the phonetic spelling, many pages of Nasby can still provide genuine entertainment.

There would have been space in *The Comic Tradition in America* for a sampling of Nasby and of that other favorite of Civil War readers, Orpheus C. Kerr (Robert Henry Newell), had Professor Lynn not included such selections as "Rip Van Winkle," and the somber allegory by Melville "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! or the Crowning of the Noble Cock Benventano," whose presence in this volume I find hard to explain. Unfortunately, one does not find in this critical anthology the clear view, which the title promises, of what the comic tradition in America is or was. By his readable and informative notes on the writers and their works, the editor does show that there was a school of vigorous "realism" in the South whose work prepared for Twain's. ("The Expensive Treat of Colonel Moses Grice" by Richard Malcolm Johnston is a most delightful example.) But besides the works of these exuberant realists of the Old Southwest, Professor Lynn has assembled an array of writing that appears to have sprung from a variety of attitudes toward American character. If there is a tradition common to this assembly, not to mention those who are not admitted, each reader is left to locate it for himself. However, the game is worth it, for *The Comic Tradition in America* offers much good information and some rewards of its own.

If certain early American humor, including a few of Professor Lynn's selections, cannot easily be fitted into a coherent tradition of American comedy in literature, some of the finest comic writing of the twentieth century has not even been accurately assayed. One case in point is the late Nathanael West. The welcome publication two years ago of his novels in a single volume, *The Complete Works of Nathanael West,* (Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, $5) does not appear to have substantially improved the public fortunes of one of the best and most durable satirical novelists of the 1930's. Then there is H. L. Mencken.

It is a tribute to Mencken's vitality, even after sickness and death, that in some quarters he is still a bad word. His cleverness and verbal ingenuity were diabolical and his whole attitude un-American; that he was wrongheaded from beginning to end (the argument runs) is proved by his refusal to see the menace of Germany and by signs in his writing of racism. At best, say others, he is a prewar curiosity whose reign of terror is a part of Americana as remote as wobblies and 3.2 beer.

This latter view is rapidly being dissipated by the publication of new collections of his best and most representative work, two presented in inexpensive editions, which offer convenient evidence that Mencken was not only a brilliant writer whose gifts



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of comic invective have seldom been matched, but a satirist of the first magnitude. His style was memorable, yet the style was never an end in itself: he wrote from a deep sense of human value and dignity. Most satirists in America have created comic characters through which to express their commentary, thereby softening and excusing any damage done. Mencken's was the first successful frontal offensive on "buncombe" ever launched on open ground in America, and the record still stands. Reading him now, especially in these editions prepared with present-day readers in mind, one finds that even when the issues have long been settled one way or the other and the victims laid away, Mencken prevails.

The success of Alistair Cooke's collection, *The Vintage Mencken* (Vintage Books, $.95), published in 1955, indicated that the country was again braced for Mencken. Done with an eye on the younger generation, as some compensation for its having missed the fireworks, the selections double as a running profile of Mencken's life and a sampling of his best. *Minority Report: H. L. Mencken's Notebooks* (Knopf, $3.95), is neither an anthology nor a reissue, but the first publication of a manuscript its author defined as "selections chosen more or less at random from the memoranda of long years devoted to the pursuit, anatomizing and embalming of ideas." *Minority Report* displays a La Rochefoucauldean Mencken, writing with the doors and windows temporarily barred against the carnival in the streets. *Prejudices: A Selection* (Vintage Books, $1.25) is an anthology published this year, made by James T. Farrell from the six volumes of *Prejudices*, which appeared between 1919 and 1927. Here is Mencken in full charge in "The Sahara of the Bozart," "On Being an American" and other of his most memorable pieces. *The Bathtub Hoax and Other Blasts and Bravos from the Chicago Tribune* (Knopf, $4.50), which also appeared this year, is another good collection, edited by Robert McHugh, of some of the occasional columns written for the *Chicago Tribune* between 1924 and 1927, when he was in top form.

Edgar Johnson, in the introduction to his *A Treasury of Satire*, described the missions of satire as follows: ". . . satire everywhere attacks evil arrogant and triumphant, pride victorious and riding for a fall. It attacks those conventional respectabilities which are really hidden absurdities or vices blindly accepted by thoughtlessness, habit or social custom. It attacks foolishness foolishly convinced that it makes sense, grinning and unrepentant in its folly. It attacks stuffed shirts, hypocrisies aping merit. . . ."

This is what Mencken did.

After *The Smart Set* and *The American Mercury*, most of the best literary satire, as well as burlesque, has turned up in the pages of *The New Yorker*—a shift into which symbolism may be read. On the face of it, *The New Yorker* does not appeal to right and reason so much as to a sort of complicity established between the magazine and the subscription. The former assumed in the latter good breeding, finer qualities, a quick, critical sense of humor, and slightly vagrant mores; and the readership developed an answering faith that the invisible editors, being of their kind, would amuse them without letting matters slip out of hand. The resulting editorial environment proved ideal for certain satirical writers, including Robert Benchley and James Thurber.

In addition to Thurber's absorbing recollections of Harold Ross, which have been appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, there have lately been several first-rate retrospective collections of writing by individual *New Yorker* writers.

*Mayor Watching and Other Pleasures* (Rinehart, $3.75) is an entertaining selection of pieces about mayors and minutiae around Manhattan, composed over the years by the closest thing New York has to Samuel Pepys, Philip Hamburger. *More in Sorrow* (Holt, $4) is a collection of Wolcott Gibbs's writing, which he assembled before his death this year. Gibbs contributed more words to the magazine than any other writer, in all departments except women's fashions and horse racing, "two fields in which my information was generally felt to be inadequate, though not by me." He excelled as a parodist, in the profile form, and



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at the "casual." *More in Sorrow* is proof that his wit and warmth were fourteen-carat and that he will be missed.

S. J. Perelman is without much question the greatest master of literary burlesque we have ever had. *The Most of S. J. Perelman* (Simon & Schuster, $5.95) is a 650-page array of his best work, his most outrageous assaults on standard American prose and pose. (Here, as the master might—or as readily might not—say, are his finest houris.) Since his early Marx brothers scripts, Perelman has been successful in elevating the ragged and ridiculous in the American idiom to pinnacles of absurdity. In another clime such an entertainer might have sought out less yielding targets for his aim and written in other forms as well as those employable by *The New Yorker*, Hollywood and Broadway; but in another clime there would not have been an S. J. Perelman. No other country is vast enough to contain a pun like *Lox vobiscum*, for one thing.

Quite another order of "*New Yorker* writer" is John Cheever, whose fine novel *The Wapshot Chronicle* (Harper, $3.50) won last year's National Book Award. His latest collection of short stories, the form in which he has usually written, is *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill* (Harper, $3), which ranges through several households in a moneyed, heavy-drinking Eastern suburb, and discloses the ravages of lost dreams and lost goals, complicated by adultery and alcohol, on a community whose members have realized a high degree of material "security." Cheever shows the tragi-comic results of the ruinous confusion between the advertised stereotype of well-being and the real thing.

American writing has in the past dealt intensively with the perils to the soul of the reckless struggle for money and status. In Cheever's community of Shady Hill, money and status of a kind have been achieved and their presences all but forgotten; yet in this premature and basically undesired fulfillment of the American dream, far more invincible problems of existence lie in wait. Possibly a new image of American character, coming after Babbitt, is in the making. Certainly John Cheever is among the best native satirists to appear since the closing of the frontier.

There are still obvious vestiges in American comic writing of the dichotomy of literature and laughter, which has strongly colored most of our literature and possibly most of our laughter. According to this puritanical view (not shared by Chaucer, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Dickens or Anatole France), the writer must choose between a comic vision of reality and a "true" one, and the reader must somehow know which he is in for and whether to prepare for laughter or for tears. One result of this strange distinction is that much of what is technically comic in our "classical" literature is unsettling. Another is that we have excelled in comedy dealing with the surface appearances of the American scene, as we continue to do. The zany, often highly entertaining diversions of the popular literary caricaturists represent the secular side of the comic tradition, which one day may be traced back to some early entertainer like George W. Harris. These writers are popular, for they answer the demand (which does not exist in the same manner and degree outside America) for palliative comedy. Conversely, Nathanael West and H. L. Mencken, not being "diverting" writers, are therefore sometimes thought not to be comic; it has proved even rarer for a "serious" American writer to achieve a comic view of life than a tragic one.

Nevertheless, the past sixty-odd years have been great ones for literary burlesque and, in a few cases, for satire deeply rooted in the American scene and character. No single humorist at present has the nation's ear, as Seba Smith, Nasby, Twain, Mencken and Will Rogers once had. And it is a matter for reflection that our best literary humorists no longer reach large audiences through the newspapers. The Reverend Haweis would be dismayed at what a small percentage of American humor is now "part and parcel of the national character." Malcolm Muggeridge of *Punch* feels that "the area of life in which ridicule is permissible is steadily shrinking, and that a dangerous tendency is becoming manifest to take ourselves with undue seriousness.



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. . . Irreverence is decidedly out of fashion, and the clown or satirist, if he is to continue in business, must keep a careful eye on his targets lest they frown unduly." Still, there are signs which give hope that a new age of satire may only be beginning. Reports of the death of the comic spirit in America are sometimes greatly exaggerated.

## *Brief Comments*

DARWIN'S CENTURY: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It. By Loren Eiseley. *Doubleday. $5.00.*

Here is that happy combination of a great theme and a perceptive, disciplined recorder. It is the biography of a pattern of thought and discovery rather than of an individual or a group. Based upon prodigious reading filtered through the mind of a man who is both scientist and poet, it is in my judgment a first-class book. It should read as freshly to our great-grandchildren as it does to us.

The growth of our concept of evolution has itself been curiously organic, like the succession of plants and animals that leads toward a stable, but living forest. It is easy enough to see the towering dominants, but it is far more of a task to reconstruct the process that has made their existence possible and to identify the humbler organisms that even now sustain them.

It is, of course, well known that Darwin had his precursors and his aides, as well as his competitors and opponents. But it is too seldom that all of these participants in the great intellectual drama of the nineteenth century are treated with such justice and sympathetic understanding as they receive from Loren Eiseley. In this day when the more active branches of science are highly competitive, the ink is scarcely dry on a journal before its contents begin to be discounted. Granted that the genius of science lies in the tentative character of even its most refined pronouncements, this subtle denigration of those who have done the best they could with what they had is something else again. It recalls the famous lines in Antony's oration. Our thanks to a historian who takes trouble to see that the good outlasts the bones!

The concluding chapter of *Darwin's Century* is, to my mind, a superb performance. In it we have the summation of one as familiar with the science of man and society as he is with so-called natural science. Its message is not simple enough to admit of compression here, although it conveys sturdy hope rather than the now fashionable despair. Perhaps some flavor of it may be had from the final paragraph: "There are very few youths today who will pause, coming from a biology class, to finger a yellow flower or poke in friendly fashion at a sunning turtle on the edge of the campus pond, and who are capable of saying to themselves, 'We are all one—all melted together.' It is for this, as much as for the difficult, concise reasoning of the *Origin*, that Darwin's shadow will run a long way forward into the future. It is his heritage from the parson-naturalists of England."

PAUL B. SEARS

THE HUMAN CONDITION. By Hannah Arendt. *University of Chicago Press. $4.75.*

The chief value of Dr. Arendt's exposition in her current book, as in her earlier *Origins of Totalitarianism*, lies not in her arbitrary definitions and far-flung generalizations, but in her flashes of insight at certain definite points. This illumination and fresh approach to specific concepts I find particularly in her elaboration of Dante's ". . . in every action what is primarily intended by the doer . . . is the disclosure of his own image," and of James Plant's distinction between "who" and "what" a person is; in her arresting discussion of the origins and implications of certain key words in Western thought; in her giving of a new twist to some familiar ideas and images, such as the contrast between Homer's and Plato's use of the cave metaphor and Montesquieu's treatment of tyranny; and in her discussion of the role that paired antithesis has played in Western philoso-



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phy. Such discernments appear most frequently in the section on Action.

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HELEN MERRELL LYND

THE LOOM OF HISTORY. By Herbert J. Muller. Illustrated. *Harper. $7.50.*

The traveler who has a three-week boat trip ahead of him before he sights the minarets of Istanbul should take along his Muller, and inscribe within the subtitle, "Musings on the History of Anatolia."

It is not a history, nor yet a guidebook, but a series of portraits of the major civilizations that have succeeded one another in Asia Minor, from the Hittites to the Turkish Republic, festooned from thumb-nail sketches of representative cities, past and present. Some of the drama is missed in this eclectic process: Where is the kingdom of Uzun Hasan? Where are the heterodox "redheads" who made life difficult for the Ottomans? But the traveler, even the armchair variety, will be delighted by the sensitive mixture of legend, literature, religion, political history, the romance of archaeology, Muller's own experiences and little digs at Toynbee.

Although the professed theme is the meeting of East and West, this comes off second best to the recurrent motif of human shortcomings, sympathetically presented for the most part, which accompanies the statement of the achievements of the Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and modern Turkish eras. Muller is at his best on the Greeks, probably because he is unashamedly Hellenophile and humanist.

RODERIC H. DAVISON

ONCE TO SINAI: The Further Pilgrimage of Friar Felix Fabri. By H. F. M. Prescott. *Macmillan. $5.00.*

In 1480 and 1483, the Dominican Felix Fabri journeyed from Ulm to Jerusalem. He left a detailed account of these pilgrimages, under the title *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem.* Using this as her cornerstone, and drawing upon the works of other travelers, as well as her wide knowledge of the Middle Ages, Hilda Prescott narrates the trials, hardships and pleasures of Fabri and his companions. *Friar Felix at Large,* published in 1950, dealt with the first voyage; *Once to Sinai* covers the monk's peregrinations to Mount Sinai, and home again by way of Egypt and Alexandria. With deft humor and careful documentation, Miss Prescott shows us through Fabri's eyes the wild and fearful deserts, the teeming medieval cities, the laborious journeys, the tense relations with Moslems, and the sometimes even tenser ones within the pilgrim band.

*Once to Sinai* is fascinating as a travel book. It is also a historical document of great value and a literary work of the distinction expected from the author of *Man on a Donkey* and *Son of Dust.* But more than this, one feels it is the affectionate debt Miss Prescott owed a man remote from her in time, but obviously near and dear to her heart. She has, by her retelling of Fabri's chronicle, made the monk himself come brilliantly alive: a man witty, courageous, unexpectedly tough and observant, yet thoroughly human and thoroughly enjoyable.

JAY WILLIAMS

THE TROUBLE MAKERS: Dissent Over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939. By A. J. P. Taylor. *Indiana University Press. $3.50.*

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THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY: A Critical History (1919-1957). By Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, with the assistance of Julius Jacobson. *Beacon.* $6.75.

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DAVID L. MARKS

DESERT ENTERPRISE: The Middle East Oil Industry in Its Local Environment. By David H. Finnie. *Harvard University Press. $5.00.*

Mr. Finnie spent two years in the Middle East observing and collecting material for this book—the first in the Harvard Middle Eastern Series.

The book is a study of the Middle East oil industry. The first three chapters discuss the companies operating in the area, concession agreements and the technical operations of the industry. The next four are about political relations, the labor force and its human problems, the impact of the industry on the local economies, and public relations. In the last chapter, the author speculates on the future of the industry.

Unlike most studies that preceded it, *Desert Enterprise* is primarily concerned with relating the industry to the political, social and economic environment in which it operates. It is, therefore, essentially a study in human relations. The author, in his approach, combines the qualities of the objective observer with those of compassion.

The book, despite its brevity in relation to the subject it attempts to cover, should be of interest to both the student of the area and the general reader. It is a particularly welcome contribution at this time, for the need to study and understand the human equation in this part of the world is indeed acute.

FAHIM I. QUBAIN

NOTES FROM THE WARSAW GHETTO: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum. Edited and translated by Jacob Sloan. *McGraw-Hill. $5.95.*

This journal is based on notes that Ringelblum, a trained Warsaw historian, began in November, 1939—two months after the Nazis had occupied Poland—and continued until the end of 1942. Ringelblum, a leader in the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, was executed by the Nazis in the ruined city on March 7, 1943, together with his wife and twelve-year-old son.

The notes were found, sealed in a rubberized milk can, among the Dantesque ruins of the Polish capital. They constitute an "archive" of incomparable disaster. This is not a diary in the conventional sense, for Ringelblum, who had the assistance of numerous eyewitness reporters, wanted to preserve an utterly objective record for posterity. He succeeded: the details are precise, often cryptic, dryly factual—but their total effect is overwhelming. Here is a record of a crime against humanity that is unprecedented in the annals of history and for which there is no name. In its own way, this is a monument to stir forever the conscience of mankind. Jacob Sloan's editing is an admirable example of historical scholarship.

SAUL K. PADOVER

SAMUEL JOHNSON: Diaries, Prayers, and Annals. Volume 1 of The Works of Samuel Johnson. Edited by E. L. McAdam, Jr., with Donald and Mary Hyde. *Yale University Press. $10.00.*

Although no group of scholars is more industrious and devoted than "the Johnsonians," there has never been an "edition" of Johnson's works that came anywhere near satisfying the minimum modern definition of the term. This first volume of the new edition, under the supervision of an imposing editorial committee, seems to assure that the situation will be rectified.

Although Johnson repeatedly urged Boswell to keep a full journal, he was himself a sporadic, fragmentary and often cryptic diarist. And although the present volume includes a hitherto unpublished section covering the years 1765-84, it will be of interest chiefly to those to whom everything concerning the author is important because they are specialists, hobbyists, or both. But they will not find anything lacking in the presentation. As far as devoted scholarship has found it possible to do, every cryptic reference is decoded and every name or event identified—often with cross quota-



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tions from Johnson, Boswell, Mrs. Thrale and others. And because the diary itself is too much abbreviated to be easily read, the editors have expanded it into a continuous record occupying the lower half or more of every page.

Few, if any, of the future volumes are likely to put a heavier burden on the editors, and perhaps one reason for choosing to issue this one first is just the fact that it seems to guarantee that no pains will be spared. Johnson's "Prayers" have, of course, been printed previously.

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

SELECTIONS FROM RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Edited by Stephen E. Whicher. *Houghton Mifflin. $1.15.*

This is not one more routine performance; it is, in fact, a very important addition to the study of American literature. Like Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* and Perry Miller's *The Transcendentalists,* Mr. Whicher's anthology has the unusual merit of dramatically organizing and proving a fresh insight into its subject.

The fresh insight is that Emerson was neither sage nor philosopher nor poet, but an intellectual diarist meeting the spiritual emergency of his times with "a shifting, complex dialectic of opposites." By placing the familiar pieces, with the exception of the poems, in a skilfully chosen, chronological context of passages from the letters and journals, Mr. Whicher makes his case so convincingly that his new Emerson seems certain to become *the* Emerson for most teachers and students. The book is a work of imagination and art. Mr. Whicher's scholarship is firm, however, throughout, not only in his general introduction and his brief forewords to various sections, but in his notes. He has gone behind the published journals to the manuscripts for newly corrected and amplified passages. This is the best of all Emerson anthologies.

CHARLES H. FOSTER

LETTERS OF THE BROWNINGS TO GEORGE BARRETT. Edited by Paul Landis with the assistance of Ronald E. Freeman. *University of Illinois Press. $6.50.*

"How far we are going to read a poet when we can read about a poet is a problem to lay before biographers." The problem, which some twenty-five years ago Virginia Woolf isolated in her essay "Aurora Leigh," has at present, in the instance of the Brownings, been settled, as volumes of letters crowd on volumes of biography. Paul Landis adds eighty-eight new letters, the majority by Elizabeth, to her brother George Barrett—"poor George," "the useful brother," Robert deprecatorily called him in his correspondence with Isabella Blagden.

Browning, who resented explorations into the private life of the writer, might have deplored this publication. But Mrs. Browning, who is clearly Mr. Landis' heroine, would have rejoiced. Letters, she protested, "always tell a story of life better than the best abstract of it, elaborated by the cold hands of another." Her own are vivacious. They are animated by her keen and well-known interest in Napoleon III, in table rapping, in the winsomeness and the problems of Penini. They are illuminated by her perceptions—often wry ("Mr. Carlyle is his friend—a good substitute for shouting") or shrewd ("Some of these days our 'great Indian Empire' will stand upon its own legs, & make use of our own rope to scourge us to a distance") or enlivened by her sense for the delightfully incongruous ("Mr. Haydon has stabbed his foot with a javelin"). The volume strongly bears out Virginia Woolf's contention that the mind of Elizabeth Barrett was "lively and secular and satirical."

FRASER NEIMAN

TURGENEV'S LITERARY REMINISCENCES. Translated and with an introduction by David Magarshack. Prefatory essay by Edmund Wilson. *Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $5.00.*

"Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, these three—and the least of these is Turgenev." So a teacher of comparative literature was wont to intone to his classes. Whether the estimate has any critical validity or not, it is a fact that Turgenev, though the most "Western" of the three, is the least known to English-speaking readers. The reasons are many. No work by Tur-



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genev has captured the general Western reader (or the fancy of Hollywood) as have *War and Peace* and *Crime and Punishment*. His writing is not the extension of a dramatic personality but the product of careful observation and refined analysis. This is most obvious in his plays, perhaps, where he so clearly anticipates Chekov's "drama of the unexpressed" and where he does not so much paint lurid flames of passion as sketch (in Stanislavsky's phrase) "the most delicate curves of experience." Even the furor aroused by his sympathetic treatment of Bazarov's nihilism in *Fathers and Sons* was almost entirely political, and Turgenev as a person did not play an important role.

Mr. Magarshack's book is a major contribution to the Turgenev canon, for we are taken, at last, close to the center of Turgenev's sensibilities. Although these reminiscences were written toward the end of his life, the subjects range widely, from recollections of Gogol, Belinsky and others, to an account of the burning and sinking of the steamer *Nicholas I*, in which the nineteen-year-old Turgenev almost lost his life. (He never denied the story, later told with such delight by his enemies, that he dashed about the deck pleading to be saved because he was the only son of a rich widow.) One of the longer pieces is an amazingly vivid and sensitive account of the execution of the murderer Troppman.

The volume is a two-for-one bargain, for it includes Edmund Wilson's excellent essay "Turgenev and the Life-Giving Drop," first printed in the *New Yorker* in 1957.

CALVIN D. LINTON

CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONCORD: The Text of Thoreau's Hitherto "Lost Journal" (1840-1841) Together with Notes and a Commentary by Perry Miller. *Houghton Mifflin. $4.00.*

We have here two books, the lesser Thoreau's text, the greater an extended essay on Thoreau by the editor. Professor Miller brings to his task a wide and authoritative scholarship coupled with boldness, energy and original insight. If this is, nevertheless, his least satisfactory book, the reason is mainly the style, which forcibly recalls Emerson's description of "the superlative temperament." Miller habitually overwrites, overinterprets, overdramatizes, until we agree, " 'T is very wearisome, this straining talk." It is true, as Emerson also wrote, "The superlative is as good as the positive, if it be alive," and at its best this book is alive.

Miller strongly feels the inner drama of Thoreau's life, and his essential argument gives an invigoratingly fresh account of it. The vigor of his embrace, however, half smothers his subject, especially with Thoreau's aloof text standing in silent reproach beside his own. The truth seems to be that the finicky demands of literary biography catch Professor Miller at a disadvantage. Those of us who believe that he might well become the greatest of all American intellectual historians will be relieved when he returns to the larger arena in which he is at home.

STEPHEN WHICHER

THE POWER OF BLACKNESS: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville. By Harry Levin. *Knopf. $4.00.*

Harry Levin's first book on American letters schematizes the black neuroses latent in the American dream. To invoke his first chapter title, he has analyzed "the American nightmare," tracing the continuing *cauchemar* from William Austin's Peter Rugg, that deracinated Missing Man about Boston, *c.* 1824, to Gatsby's failing faith in the Bitch Goddess.

Mr. Levin has studied the lives of his writers too—indeed, his work is focused around Hawthorne, Poe and Melville—but he commits no biographical fallacy. The whole world of scholarship is Mr. Levin's village, and one vast dark village it is. The triptych Chillingworth, Ahab, Poe's "The Man That Was Used Up" are all damned, but then so were their makers. Why? Hawthorne might depose, as he did in *The House of the Seven Gables*, "What other dungeon is so dark as one's own heart! What jailer so inexorable as one's self!" But, another plea by way of confession and avoidance might be that entered by the doomed Elsie Venner's own black mammy: "It a'nt her fault! It a'nt her fault! If they



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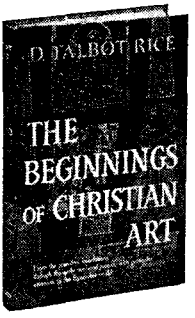


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knew all that I know they wouldn' blame that poor child."

Mr. Levin, who surely knows a splendid amount, blames no one. As in the case of the possibly guiltless Elsie, he suggests that the culpability of his doomed Americans lay not in themselves, but in the fact that they were bitten by some bête noire of destiny. The "irrepressible conflict" affords but one situs for impersonal guilt. Or, to carry forth the image: Americans have been ill-starred by night, even when, by day, they seem to live under sunny Western skies.

On occasion, evil has proved serviceable, while goodness has turned out to be an investment that failed. Blonde Little Eva was too pure to endure corrupt Louisiana society, but black Topsy could strike some grim bargain with reality by a life of painful good works in puritan New England. Nevertheless, Mr. Levin's sympathies lie with all his great, dark, underground men, who, beaten by one white whale or another, go down.

HERBERT FEINSTEIN

CONRAD THE NOVELIST. By Albert J. Guérard. *Harvard University Press. $5.50.*

This powerful, if uneven, book searches for Conrad's special voice. It seeks to define his moral attitudes, the reasons for his successes and failures, the moments when his style is energized and when it is flat. Mr. Guérard knows his way around symbols, archetypal myths and night journeys into the unconscious. These he applies with a saving detachment. He is not free of jargon —the phrase "psycho-moral" is almost a fetish—and his persistent attempt to find Conrad satisfactory insofar as he resembles Faulkner can only irritate admirers of both. Yet no one has written subtler accounts of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and *Under Western Eyes,* or deflated *Victory* so irrefutably. Less satisfactory are the comments on *An Outcast of the Islands,* with their unresponsiveness to its sexual theme, and on *Nostromo,* with their astonishing neglect of Nostromo himself.

Mr. Guérard's perceptions are more convincing than his theories. His claims that Conrad is ineffective without a narrator and cannot describe direct physical action are refuted by *The Secret Agent.* His belief that Conrad is incapable of handling love is made dubious by the remarkable treatment of the Goulds, among others. These strictures, however, only underline the scope of his critical discourse.

LEO GURKO

THE POETRY OF GREEK TRAGEDY. By Richmond Lattimore. *The Johns Hopkins Press. $3.50.*

In this book, which consists of six lectures given at Johns Hopkins University in 1957, Mr. Lattimore is concerned with the problem of how the poetry of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides determines the quality of their drama. Aware that it is not always possible to distinguish a poetic effect from a dramatic one, Mr. Lattimore points out the "special contribution" the poetry of each of the three Greek tragedians makes to his drama, and in so doing elucidates qualities of both the poetry and the drama that have not been emphasized before.

The chapters on Sophocles perhaps best illustrate his unique approach. The clue to Sophocles' work, he says, is *anōmalia.* Although Plutarch regarded *anōmalia* (unevenness) as a fault, Mr. Lattimore feels it is the clue to the "essential poetry and drama" of Sophocles, and with this clue he leads us to the dark, irrational, even daemonic, elements of the poetry and to the lucid dramatic structure of Sophoclean tragedy.

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LILLIAN FEDER

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**by Bernice Slote**

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the elements that have won international acclaim for Camus, and yet it makes an unsatisfying book. At least one of the stories seems to me to be Camus at his best—"The Guest," in which a young schoolteacher, a man of simplicity and decency, performs an act of love and earns hate, because history has to be paid off. The story is set in Algeria, but Camus makes it seem everywhere; its impact is universal and personal. Here is a very gifted and concerned writer at his strongest, telling a story that grips, moves and illuminates.

Each of the other stories has a quality of its own; but in each it seems an isolated quality, almost an exercise in the use of that particular idea. "The Adulterous Woman" betrays her husband more in thought than in deed, but there is little story here and little revelation. "The Renegade" is superbly vivid in its depiction of the flesh defied, but the point is obvious and naked. "The Silent Men" is a kind of strike story, skillful in creating the hopelessness of comradeship between workers and boss, but it is all there at the start. "The Artist at Work" is Gogol with insufficient irony, and "The Growing Stone" is Conrad *en petit.*

My complaint is not that this is poor work; it is far from that. But it is inferior Camus—and still worth reading.

S. M. Bessie

THE BANQUET YEARS: The Arts in France, 1885-1918. By Roger Shattuck. *Harcourt, Brace. $8.50.*

Roger Shattuck, who is an assistant professor of Romance languages at the University of Texas, here has managed to fashion evident passions for poetry, painting, the theater, literature in general and social history in particular, into a most seductive documentary. His period is *la belle époque,* "the good old days. The thirty years of peace, prosperity, and internal dissension which lie across 1900. . . ." His basic symbol is the banquet: "For Paris they were the Banquet Years. The banquet had become the supreme rite." His method of telling the history of these three decades is through "representative men." He explains this "old reliable method" as "half systematic research and half intuitive game . . . the art of finding little families of personages whose mere association suggests an interpretation of the age."

Mr. Shattuck's family in *The Banquet Years* consists of Henri Rousseau, primitive painter; Erik Satie, curious composer; Alfred Jarry, revolutionary playwright; Guillaume Apollinaire, poet and *avant-gardiste extraordinaire.* At times his family serves him better than he serves it, for there is a kind of opportunism in Mr. Shattuck's approach that mars the total effect. These comparatively sensational lives do not need their sensationalism pointed up, and they are intensely articulate in themselves.

No *Mauve Decade,* although as indefatigably researched, *The Banquet Years* is a most effective excursion in bric-a-brac biography. And some of Mr. Shattuck's curios are stunners.

Leo Lerman



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# *The Reader Replies*

THE READER REPLIES *carries miscellaneous comments by readers and authors on various articles which have appeared in the magazine. All communications should be addressed to: The Editor,* THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington 9, D. C. Because of limitations of space, we cannot guarantee to print all letters received.*

—EDITOR

There is no justification for the gratuitous insult to Southerners contained in Professor Marston Bates's article "Man, Food and Sex" [AS: Autumn, 1958]. I regret that THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR published it.

SAMUEL M. BEMISS
Richmond, Virginia

* * *

It requires some audacity for me to criticize Lynn White's article, "Dynamo and Virgin Reconsidered" [AS: Spring, 1958], that discusses a book I have never read; but, if I have understood Mr. White's explanations of the symbols, I believe I have a point of interest. Adams' Virgin as the personification of life force, the fecund, multiplying principle, may well include manual, mechanical and industrial powers in her godhood, and it is perhaps a Cartesian error of categorization of Mr. White's that leads to a belief that Adams' Virgin was a purely spiritual being without powers in mundane affairs. On the contrary, that is just what nature goddesses have: power and control over all the minute processes of the world. The Hermetic figure was Isis —mother of the gods, queen of harvest, inspirer and protector of trades and crafts. The Magi, mystics and investigators of the Renaissance, did not distinguish between what they considered natural processes; their views of science, mechanics, scholarship and magic seem to us inextricably confused.

Windmills and water mills were built by hand; they also served as habitations for the owners. They were charged with an emotional quality and coloring that dynamos, produced by machines, hidden in use, and working other machines, do not have. The quality of emotion, undoubtedly of love, of participating in the giant round of nature and having it produce useful gain, of building not an engineering feat but a monument of awe to a great power, contrasts with the seemingly inhuman detachment and other purposeful autonomy of the dynamo.

All this is indeed familiar; the mechanization of human activities and expression is learned as soon as the young student—very young—begins to have second thoughts about the beneficent workings of progress. As the Greeks had the limiting belief that intellectual activities are incompatible with manual occupations, so we seem to believe that intellect produces an indifferent coldness, a lack of passion; and passion implies a lack of discrimination, of intellect. We are definitely in error if we presume that another person of another time also operates under the same categories; that people possessed by a fervor of emotion, directed upon a figure that most people today may believe in only as a manifestation of psychic impulses, could use an analytical and mechanical intellect in building their churches and their power plants—all these are brought into the manifold aspects of the Virgin, as they were into the occult image of Isis.

The Virgin is an excellent symbol for the concept not of a spiritualized being, but of a hierarchical universe that worked on the power and love of God, uniting into a



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whole the many processes, purposes and objects of the world.

CHARLES E. CHERUBIN
Brooklyn, New York

* * *

This letter is to report my violent reaction to Daniel Lerner's article "Comfort and Fun: Morality in a Nice Society" [AS: Spring, 1958]. I am shocked and disaffected by the conclusions that this author reaches. I hope he reads and meditates the wholly different interpretation of today's social mood expressed by Oscar Mandel ["Nobility and the United States"] in this same issue. Mr. Mandel's convincing social analysis brings him to despair, whereas Professor Lerner's superficial survey of the same general facts leads him to a cheerful but preposterous conclusion.

This conclusion is that the "new social ethic" of general capitulation to "comfort and fun" may possibly be "genuinely superior as a guide to life in an abundant society." Professor Lerner seems to have forgotten all the history he ever read. He is plugging for the old "bread and circuses," and in his zeal to be open-minded he doesn't seem to realize it. The capitulation of a people to comfort and fun, as this author describes the process, leads, I should say, not to life but to death, to social death and national extinction.

Professor Lerner's weird defense of mass communications is totally unconvincing. Through most of my life I have worked in and for the modern means of communications he is discussing, and I say his facts are more or less correct, but his conclusions nonsense. His happy ending final sentence is contradicted by the facts he presents. I hope he reads Mr. Mandel's article.

THOMAS H. UZZELL
Stillwater, Oklahoma

* * *

In "Religion and the Younger Generation" [AS: Summer, 1958], Stanley J. Rowland, Jr., records the recent turning from a social and cosmological preoccupation to a teleological one. He says that this interest is divided between those who feel hopeless


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of finding a purpose in life and those who turn back to religion to find such a purpose.

Unfortunately, he fails to define the meaning of, or the purpose in, life. Presumably he refers to its usual sense, and that is, at least in essence, religious.

Thus the purpose in life is basically "otherworldly"—to gain the metaphysical life eternal. Those who do not accept this definition and believe the purpose to be the living of life as an end in itself—"the good life"—do not have the feeling of assurance that the "otherworldly" purpose gives.

They cannot eat their cake and have it too, and that is why they are so unsettled. This is written merely to point out that those who do not accept the orthodox viewpoint ought neither to expect nor to try to feel the assurance that orthodoxy gives.

DAVID HAMBLEN
Newton, Massachusetts

* * *

The Winter, 1957-58, issue is refreshing and thought-provoking enough to justify a year's subscription alone. In particular, John W. Ward's perceptive appraisal of James Gould Cozzens' work seemed to me highly pertinent, and expressed in valid terms. It did surprise me, however, that Mr. Ward joined the rather optimistic chorus of those who attribute the sudden popular acceptance of Cozzens to a favorable intellectual climate.

I submit, regretfully to be sure, that neither *The Last Adam* nor *The Just and the Unjust*, to mention only two of his better previous works, would be received with any greater acclaim were they published today than they had been accorded when originally published. No, let us face facts (even if Bergen Evans would apostrophize the heavens at the sight of such a monumental cliché): *By Love Possessed* not only boasts a titillating title, but also justifies it by a detailed and explicit examination of the characters' sex life. This examination is certainly an integral ingredient of the novel's major theme; still, Mr. Cozzens, entirely without premeditation and in the innocence of his artistic integrity, has cre-

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ated a work that appeals to a vast audience, not by virtue of its fundamental merits but because of the incidental trappings. And if any evidence is required to support this bleak thesis, one might point to the almost negligible increase in the sale of his previous novels—the "intellectual climate" is evidently no more favorable to them than it was ten or twenty years ago.

LASZLO STRAKA
White Plains, New York

* * *

I have read with pleasure and profit the articles on "Faiths for a Complex World" [AS: Autumn, 1957]. One impression came to me on first sight of the title. Whatever new things may be found, whatever new names may be given, there are bound to be some sound, good old principles and forces that are working now, and working as in the past.

When I read the articles, noting with interest the different phases and elements of their faiths, all of the writers seemed to me to give Christian principles as the convictions by which they lived. Says Henry Beetle Hough: "The Christian ethic is completely satisfying." But these writers seem to avoid the Biblical statements although the statements support, in essence, their faith. Joseph Wood Krutch says, "Like many of my contemporaries I don't like to bring in God. For one thing, the term has been defined in too many ways to be meaningful. . . . In a sense, God—or at least a useful substitute for Him—exists."

". . . whatever may be the secret of divinity, I hold that the universe was conceived and fashioned not haphazardly, but with plan, system and purpose, and that we, here on earth, have been appointed to be the instruments and agents of the plan," says Melville Cane. He speaks, in a poem, of winning immortality: "This is the task, the prayer,—that I may save / The suffering god within, that he may live, / And greatly live, beyond the grave." (Read John 4:14)

R. L. Duffus declares: "I do believe in a purpose in the universe. I believe also in a life instinct and in the power of this instinct over all the forces of the modern hell to which we often seem to be moving."

These several statements are all supported by the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures: Genesis 1:24, I Corinthians 3, 9, John 16:33.

Cid Ricketts Sumner, while seated alone near a lilac bush and viewing with worshipful interest nature's gifts of a silver lake and a snow-capped mountain in Norway, states well her estimate of isolated, undisturbed, religious contemplation.

"What do I find in such a quiet, lonely place? I find myself . . . . just one small lone critter, almost but not quite lost against a background of space and silence. . . . I feel, I know, that there is Something greater than I, a delectable force, a power, a source of joy and light from which I receive sustenance not only sober but gay, and courage for the body's pain and the heart's grief." She has thus met the Master's rule for prayer (Matthew 6:6).

René Fueloep-Miller deals with the problem and mystery of humanity's sufferings. "I learned the lesson . . . to identify the Self with the suffering of others, and thus to understand the real brotherhood on earth which evolves from the common lot of suffering . . . . 'by giving . . . we receive.' " "Only love endows us with a complete awareness of the You and the others; through love alone can we reach out to them and up to God, and grasp the ultimate spiritual reality of living" (John 4: 7, 8).

Jesus has been called the human life of God. Let a would-be disciple of Jesus remember that it is not opinions and arguments and dissertations about the Master that He requires, but obedience: and that not hearing but doing His commandments surely brings lasting joy to the heart. As an old hymn says, "There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."

B. W. ARNOLD, JR.
Bedford, Virginia



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